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TRANSMITTAL**

*(only for new nonprovisional applications under 37 CFR 1.53(b))*

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First Inventor or Application Identifier

Hiroshi HATTORI, et al.

Title

OBSTACLE DETECTION SYSTEM AND METHOD THEREFOR

jc813 J.S. PTO  
09/11/00  
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**APPLICATION ELEMENTS**

*See MPEP chapter 600 concerning utility patent application contents*

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- ☒ Fee Transmittal Form (e.g. PTO/SB/17)  
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2. ☒ Specification

Total Pages

114

3. ☒ Drawing(s) (35 U.S.C. 113) Total Sheets

21

4. ☐ Oath or Declaration

Total Pages

- a. ☐ Newly executed (original or copy)  
b. ☐ Copy from a prior application (37 C.F.R. §1.63(d))  
(for continuation/divisional with box 15 completed)  
i. ☐ **DELETION OF INVENTOR(S)**  
Signed statement attached deleting inventor(s) named  
in the prior application, see 37 C.F.R. §1.63(d)(2) and  
1.33(b).

5. ☐ Incorporation By Reference *(usable if box 4B is checked)*  
The entire disclosure of the prior application, from which a copy of the  
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of the disclosure of the accompanying application and is hereby  
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**ACCOMPANYING APPLICATION PARTS**

6. ☐ Assignment Papers (cover sheet & document(s))  
7. ☐ 37 C.F.R. §3.73(b) Statement ☐ Power of Attorney  
*(when there is an assignee)*  
8. ☐ English Translation Document *(if applicable)*  
9. ☐ Information Disclosure Statement (IDS)/PTO-1449 ☐ Copies of IDS Citations  
10. ☐ Preliminary Amendment  
11. ☒ White Advance Serial No. Postcard  
12. ☐ Small Entity Statement(s) ☐ Statement filed in prior application. Status still proper and desired.  
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14. ☒ Other: Notice of Priority, List of Inventors' Names and Addresses

15. If a CONTINUING APPLICATION, check appropriate box, and supply the requisite information below:

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Prior application information: Examiner:

Group Art Unit:

16. Amend the specification by inserting before the first line the sentence:

☐ This application is a ☐ Continuation ☐ Division ☐ Continuation-in-part (CIP)  
of application Serial No. Filed on

☐ This application claims priority of provisional application Serial No. Filed

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# OBSTACLE DETECTION SYSTEM AND METHOD THEREFOR

## BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

### 1. Technical Field

The present invention relates to an obstacle detection system for detecting an obstacle existing on a ground, such as a preceding vehicle, a pedestrian or a parked vehicle with cameras mounted on a vehicle, so as to support the safe drive of an automobile.

### 2. Background Art

The technology for detecting an obstacle with a sensor is coarsely divided into one utilizing a laser beam or ultrasonic waves and one utilizing TV cameras. The technology utilizing the laser beam costs high and is impractical. On the other hand, the technology utilizing the ultrasonic waves has a low resolution so that it is troubled by the detection precision of the obstacle.

On the contrary, the TV cameras are relatively inexpensive so that they are suitable for the obstacle detection from the aspects of the resolution, the measuring precision and the measuring range. In the case of using the TV cameras, there are methods of employing one camera and a plurality of cameras (or stereo cameras).

In the method of employing the single camera, the ground region and the obstacle region are separated with the clue of





$$u_r = \frac{h_{11}u_i + h_{12}v_i + h_{13}}{h_{31}u_i + h_{32}v_i + h_{33}}, \quad v_r = \frac{h_{21}u_i + h_{22}v_i + h_{23}}{h_{31}u_i + h_{32}v_i + h_{33}} \quad (1)$$

$h = (h_{11}, h_{12}, h_{13}, h_{21}, h_{22}, h_{23}, h_{31}, h_{32}, h_{33})^T$  ( $T$  designates a transposition symbol) are parameters depending upon the locations and positions of the individual cameras with respect to the ground plane and upon the focal lengths and image origins of the lenses of the individual cameras. The parameters  $h$  are predetermined from the projected points of four or more points of the ground plane on the left and right images. By using these relations, the corresponding point  $P'(u_r, v_r)$  on the right image is determined when it is assumed that an arbitrary point  $P(u_l, v_l)$  on the left image is present on the ground plane.

If the point P is present on the ground plane, the points P and P' are a set of the correct corresponding points so that the difference between their intensities becomes small. When the points P and P' have largely different intensities, therefore, it is decided that the point P belongs to the obstacle region. In the following, Equation 1 will be called the "ground plane constraint".

In this method, the search for corresponding points is also unnecessary. The ordinary stereo method requires the search for matching points between the left and right images so that its computation cost is high because the correspondence

is made by the search computation. However, the aforementioned method requires no correspondence search so that the computational cost is extremely inexpensive.

If the stereo cameras are fixed in the three-dimensional space, the obstacle existing on the ground plane can be detected by the parameters  $H$  once determined. While the vehicle is running, however, the relative geometric relationship between the ground plane and the individual cameras are changed time after time by the vibration of the vehicle itself and the change in the inclination of the ground. In short, the parameters  $h$  change during the traveling so that the ground plane constraint determined at a still time cannot be used for the obstacle detections during the traveling.

In order to solve this problem, there has been usually used a method for detecting the obstacle by computing the ground plane constraint using a number of featuring points (e.g., the corner points of the paints on the ground) on the ground plane. It is, however, difficult to extract the numerous featuring points on the ground plane, and it frequently occurs that the featuring points on the obstacle are erroneously extracted. Moreover, the correspondence search of the extracted featuring points has to be performed to raise the computation cost. Also, with the large number of parameters to be determined, there has been a problem that it is seriously difficult to determine the ground plane constraint stably.

## OBJECTS OF THE INVENTION

As described hereinbefore, the obstacle detection system is coarsely divided into one using the laser beam or the ultrasonic waves and one using the TV cameras. However, the obstacle detection system utilizing the laser beam and the ultrasonic waves is troubled by its high price or by its low measurement precision.

On the other hand, the obstacle detection system utilizing the TV cameras is troubled by a limited using environment, by the necessity for the calibration requiring the long time and the many works, by the necessity for the correspondence search of the left and right images of the high computation cost, and by the absence of the practical counter-measures for the vibration during the traveling of the vehicle and the inclination of the ground.

Therefore, the present invention has been conceived in view of the aforementioned background and contemplates to provide an obstacle detection system and a method therefor, which is enabled to detect an obstacle existing on the ground plane at a high speed even with the vibration during a traveling and an inclination of the ground itself, by determining the geometric relations between the ground plane and the individual cameras with less troubles of the calibration and using two lines segmenting the driving lane.









the ratio which is determined from the vertical size of the polygonal region in the obstacle region image and the size from the lower end of the polygonal region to the scan-line including the vanishing point for the lines on a plane.

According to the invention of Claim 7, there is provided an obstacle detection system comprising:

a plurality of image pickup units having light receiving units disposed at a substantial spacing from each other for taking the regions, to which the light receiving units are directed, simultaneously as images;

an image storage unit for storing the images taken by the image pickup units;

a difference detection unit for determining the corresponding region in the second image, as corresponding to an arbitrary region in the first image, assuming that the arbitrary region is caused by a plane in a three-dimensional space, to compare the intensities of the arbitrary region and the corresponding region, thereby to extract the region having a substantially different intensity as an obstacle region to obtain an obstacle region image from the extracted result; and

a height computation unit for extracting a polygonal region, as composed of an intensity higher than a standard value, of the obstacle region image thereby to detect as a true obstacle region the polygonal region of a threshold or higher value of the ratio which is determined from the vertical size of the

polygonal region in the obstacle region image and the size from the lower end of the polygonal region to the scan-line set in the obstacle region image.

According to the invention of Claim 8, there is provided an obstacle detection system comprising:

a first image pickup unit and a second image pickup unit for obtaining a first image information of a first image and a second image information of a second image, respectively, by taking the surrounding region of a driver's own vehicle substantially simultaneously as images formed of a set of pixels from light receiving units arranged at a spacing on the own vehicle;

an image information storage unit for storing the first image information and the second image information;

an intensity difference image forming unit for forming an intensity difference image by determining the corresponding pixels in the second image of the second image information, as assuming that an arbitrary pixel of the first image of the first image information stored in the image information storage unit exists on the ground plane being traveled by the own vehicle, to determine the intensity difference between the arbitrary pixel and the corresponding pixel;

a discrimination image forming unit for obtaining a discrimination image by discriminating each pixel in the intensity difference image into a pixel having an intensity

difference no less than a standard value and a pixel having an intensity difference less than the standard value; and

a decision unit for detecting and deciding a region having a generally wedge-shaped set of pixels in the discrimination image as an obstacle region.

According to the invention of Claim 9, there is provided an obstacle detection system according to Claim 8,

wherein the detection unit decides that the lowermost pixel in the wedge-shaped region of the discrimination image is either at a point of contact between the obstacle region in the first or second image, as corresponding to the discrimination image, and the ground being traveled by the own vehicle, or at a portion of the obstacle region and the closest to the own vehicle.

According to the invention of Claim 10, there is provided an obstacle detection system according to Claim 8 or 9,

wherein the detection unit decides that such one of the generally wedge-shaped region existing generally in the scan-line direction of the first and second images, as corresponding to the discrimination image, that its side is at a higher location of the first and second images than the apexes opposed thereto, is the obstacle region.

According to the invention of Claim 11, there is provided an obstacle detection system according to Claim 8,

wherein the detection unit decides one pair of

wedge-shaped regions generally of the same shape, as located at a spacing on the generally identical scan-line in the discrimination image, and decides the region between the paired wedge-shaped regions as the obstacle.

According to the invention of Claim 12, there is provided an obstacle detection system comprising:

an image input unit for inputting and storing at least two images of different pickup points;

a feature extraction unit for extracting a projected point of a motion of an object, as stands still or moves on a plane in a three-dimensional space with respect to the pickup point of a standard image, upon the standard image corresponding to an infinite point, by employing one of the images stored by the image input unit as the standard image and the other as a reference image;

a detection unit for calculating a corresponding point on the reference image when it is assumed that an arbitrary point on the standard image is on the plane, to detect a point non-existing on the plane from the intensity difference between the arbitrary point and the corresponding point; and

a contact time computing unit for computing the time period for the point non-existing on the plane to come to the taken point of the standard image, on the basis of the point non-existing on the plane in the standard image detected by the detection unit and the projected point extracted from the







wherein the parameter computation step expresses the relation to hold between the projected points of an arbitrary point of the plane in the three-dimensional space upon the individual images by a two-dimensional affine transformation thereby to determine the affine transformation parameters.

According to the invention of Claim 20, there is provided an obstacle detection method according to any of Claims 17 to 19,

wherein the feature extraction step extracts a plurality of lines, as existing on the plane in the three-dimensional space and parallel to each other in the three-dimensional space, from the images, and determines the vanishing points of the lines.

According to the invention of Claim 21, there is provided an obstacle detection method according to any of Claims 17 to 19,

wherein the feature extraction step extracts a plurality of lines, as existing on the plane in the three-dimensional space and parallel to each other in the three-dimensional space, from the images, and determines the inclinations of the lines on the images and the vanishing points of the lines.

According to the invention of Claim 22, there is provided an obstacle detection method comprising:

a plurality of image pickup steps of taking the regions, to which light receiving units disposed on a driver's own vehicle







difference no less than a standard value and a pixel having an intensity difference less than the standard value; and

a decision step of detecting and deciding a region having a generally wedge-shaped set of pixels in the discrimination image as an obstacle region.

According to the invention of Claim 25, there is provided an obstacle detection method according to Claim 24,

wherein the detection step decides that the lowermost pixel in the wedge-shaped region of the discrimination image is either at a point of contact between the obstacle region in the first or second image, as corresponding to the discrimination image, and the ground being traveled by the own vehicle, or at a portion of the obstacle region and the closest to the own vehicle.

According to the invention of Claim 26, there is provided an obstacle detection method according to Claim 24 or 25,

wherein the detection step decides that such one of the generally wedge-shaped region existing generally in the scan-line direction of the first and second images, as corresponding to the discrimination image, that its side is at a higher location of the first and second images than the apexes opposed thereto, is the obstacle region.

According to the invention of Claim 27, there is provided an obstacle detection method according to Claim 24,

wherein the detection step decides one pair of



feature extraction step.

According to the invention of Claim 29, there is provided an obstacle detection method according to Claim 28,

wherein the contact time computation step computes the time period for the point on the boundary with the plane to come to the taken point of the standard image, on the basis of such ones of the points detected by the detection step but not existing on the plane, as are located on the boundary line with the plane in the standard image and are extracted as the projected point by the feature extraction step.

According to the invention of Claim 30, there is provided an obstacle detection method according to Claim 28 or 29,

wherein the feature extraction step extracts a plurality of lines aligned to the direction of the motion of an object which stands still or moves on the plane relative to the pickup point of the standard image, to employ the point of intersection of the extracted lines, as the projected point.

According to the invention of Claim 31, there is provided an obstacle detection method according to any Claims 28 to 30,

wherein the images are unknown on the relative locations and positions of their pickup points and on their focal lengths and principal points.

According to the invention of Claim 32, there is provided an obstacle detection method according to any of Claims 28 to 31,



wherein the detection step computes the corresponding point on the reference image when the arbitrary point on the standard image is assumed to be on the plane, to detect the non-existing point from a similarity of the surrounding intensities of the arbitrary point and the corresponding point.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 shows an example of Embodiment 1;

Fig. 2 shows an entire construction of Embodiment 1;

Fig. 3 is a diagram for explaining a stereo camera coordinate system;

Fig. 4 is a diagram for explaining an inclined plane;

Fig. 5 is a diagram for explaining a parameter  $\beta$ ;

Fig. 6 is a diagram for explaining two white lines on the two ends of a ground and their vanishing point;

Fig. 7 is a diagram for explaining changes in the two white lines of the two ends of the ground being traveled;

Fig. 8 shows a modification of a detection unit 5;

Fig. 9 shows stereo images;

Fig. 10 is a diagram for explaining a right image and its transformed image;

Fig. 11 is a diagram for explaining a left image and the transformed image of the right image;

Fig. 12 is a diagram for explaining a positional relation between a ground plane and a stereo camera;

Fig. 13 is a diagram for explaining an epipolar constraint of an obstacle detection system of the invention;

Fig. 14 is a diagram for explaining the actions of a feature extraction unit;

Fig. 15 is a diagram for explaining the actions of a difference detection unit;

Fig. 16 is another diagram for explaining the actions of the difference detection unit;

Fig. 17 is a block diagram of Embodiment 2-1 of the obstacle detection system;

Fig. 18 is another diagram for explaining the actions of a height detection unit of Embodiment 2-1 of the obstacle detection system;

Fig. 19 is a diagram for explaining other actions of the height detection unit of Embodiment 2-1 of the obstacle detection system;

Fig. 20 is a block diagram of Embodiment 2-2 of the obstacle detection system;

Fig. 21 is a diagram for explaining the actions of a difference detection unit of Embodiment 2-2 of the obstacle detection system;

Fig. 22 is a diagram for explaining the difference detection unit of Embodiment 2-2 of the obstacle detection system;

Fig. 23 is a diagram for explaining the difference





Fig. 44 is a diagram for explaining a depth;  
Fig. 45 is a diagram (1) for explaining a time to contact;  
Fig. 46 is a diagram (2) for explaining the time to contact;  
Fig. 47 is a block diagram of a modification of the  
detection unit 4;

Fig. 48 shows stereo images;

Fig. 49 is a diagram for explaining a right image and  
its transformed image; and

Fig. 50 is a diagram for explaining a left image and the  
transformed image of a right image.

#### BEST MODES FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

##### <Embodiment 1>

Embodiment 1 of the invention will be described with  
reference to the accompanying drawings.

In this Embodiment, there is imagined a situation that  
an obstacle existing on a ground plane such as a pedestrian,  
a preceding vehicle or a parked vehicle is detected by two left  
and right stereo cameras mounted on a vehicle, as shown in Fig.  
1.

Fig. 2 shows a schematic construction of the obstacle  
detection system according to this Embodiment. This obstacle  
detection system is constructed to include an image input unit  
1, an image storage unit 2, a feature extraction unit 3, a  
parameter computation unit 4 and a detection unit 5. The









$$= Y + \beta + \underline{h_{31}X + \Delta t_3} \simeq Y + \beta \quad (5)$$

wherein letter  $\beta$  indicates a displacement, as shown in Fig. 5, in the Y-direction between the middle point of the view points of the left and right cameras and the origin of the coordinate, and  $t_3 = \beta + \Delta t_3$ .

Therefore, Equation (4) can be simplified, as follows:

$$u \simeq \frac{h_{11}X + h_{12}Y + t_1}{Y + \beta}, \quad v \simeq \frac{h_{21}X + h_{22}Y + t_2}{Y + \beta} \quad (6)$$

If  $Y_c = Y + \beta$ ,

$$\begin{bmatrix} u \\ v \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} h_{11} & t_1 - \beta h_{12} \\ h_{21} & t_2 - \beta h_{22} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} X/Y_c \\ 1/Y_c \end{bmatrix} + \begin{bmatrix} h_{12} \\ h_{22} \end{bmatrix} \quad (7)$$

The matrix of the right side is designated by M. If the point of intersection (or vanishing point) of the white lines l1 and l2 is expressed by  $t = (u_0, v_0)^T$ ,  $(h_{12}, h_{22})^T = t$ . If  $X = (X/Y_c, 1/Y_c)^T$  and if the projected points of the point P of the ground plane on the left and right images are designated by  $u_l$  and  $u_r$ , the following Formula is obtained ( $t_l$  and  $t_r$  are the vanishing

point of the white lines):

$$u_l - t_l = M_l X, \quad u_r - t_r = M_r X \quad (8)$$

Therefore, the following Formula is obtained:

$$u_r - t_r = M_r M_l^{-1} (u_l - t_l) = A (u_l - t_l) \quad (9)$$

Here, letters "l" and "r" designate suffixes to the left and right images, respectively. Since the stereo cameras are not calibrated, letters  $M_l$  and  $M_r$  have unknown values, but letter  $A$  is predetermined from the featuring point on the ground plane having no inclination at the still time.

It is assumed (Fig. 4) that the ground plane is changed from the standard plane  $Z = 0$  to the inclined plane  $Z = pY$  by the change in the inclination of the ground and the vibration of the own vehicle at the traveling time. The inclination in the X-direction can be generally ignored because it is sufficiently smaller than that in the Y-direction. If the line of intersection between the inclined plane and the standard plane is taken on the X-axis, the Formula of the inclined plane

can be expressed by  $Z = pY$ . Here will be described a method of computing the ground plane constraint with respect to  $Z = pY$  from the motions (Fig. 7) of the two white lines. The projected positions  $(u', v')$  of the point  $(X, Y, Z)$  on the inclined plane on the images are expressed under the aforementioned two premises by substituting  $Z = pY$  into Equation (2), as follows:

$$u' = \frac{h_{11}X + (h_{12} + ph_{13})Y + t_1}{(1 + ph_{33})Y + \beta} \quad (10)$$

If it is assumed that the inclination is small, namely, that  $p$  is substantially equal to 0, the following Formula is obtained:

$$u' \simeq \frac{h_{11}X + (h_{12} + ph_{13})Y + t_1}{Y + \beta} \quad (11)$$

If  $Y_c = Y + \beta$  and if a similar transformation is made for  $v'$  by Equation (3), the following Formula is obtained:

$$\begin{bmatrix} u' \\ v' \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} h_{11} & t_1 - \beta u'_0 \\ h_{21} & t_2 - \beta v'_0 \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} X/Y_C \\ 1/Y_C \end{bmatrix} + \begin{bmatrix} u'_0 \\ v'_0 \end{bmatrix} \quad (12)$$

wherein  $(u'_0, v'_0)^T = t'$  indicates the vanishing point of the two white lines.

If:

$$\Delta u = (\Delta u, \Delta v)^T = u - t;$$

and

$$\Delta u' = (\Delta u', \Delta v')^T = u' - t',$$

the foregoing Formula is transformed into because  $\Delta u = MX$  from Equation (7):

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta u' &= \begin{bmatrix} h_{11} & t_1 - \beta u_0 \\ h_{21} & t_2 - \beta v_0 \end{bmatrix} X + \beta \begin{bmatrix} 0 & \Delta u_0 \\ 0 & \Delta v_0 \end{bmatrix} X \\ &= \Delta u + \beta/Y_C \Delta t \end{aligned} \quad (13)$$

wherein

$$\Delta t = (\Delta u_0, \Delta v_0)^T = t - t'.$$

From the Formula (7), the following Formula is obtained:

$$X = M^{-1} \Delta u \quad (14)$$

and if the following Formula is defined,  $1/Y_c = m_{21}\Delta u + m_{22}\Delta v$ :

$$M^{-1} = \begin{bmatrix} m_{11} & m_{12} \\ m_{21} & m_{22} \end{bmatrix} \quad (15)$$

Therefore, Equation (13) is transformed into:

$$\Delta u' = \begin{bmatrix} 1 + \beta_1 \Delta u_0 & \beta_2 \Delta u_0 \\ \beta_1 \Delta v_0 & 1 + \beta_2 \Delta v_0 \end{bmatrix} \Delta u \quad (16)$$

wherein it is assumed that  $\beta_1 = m_{21}\beta$  and that  $\beta_2 = m_{22}\beta$ .  
If one white line on the images is changed, as shown in Fig. 7, by the inclination from  $l_1 : \Delta v = p_1 \Delta u$  to  $l_1' : \Delta v' = p_1' \Delta u'$ , the following Formula is obtained from Equation (16):

$$(p_1' \Delta u_0 - \Delta v_0) \beta_1 + p_1 (p_1' \Delta u_0 - \Delta v_0) \beta_2 = p_1 - p_1' \quad (17)$$

If a similar transformation is made for the other white line ( $l_2 \rightarrow l_2'$ ), the following Formula is obtained, and there are obtained two one-dimensional equations on  $\beta = (\beta_1, \beta_2)^T$ :

$$(p'_2 \Delta u_0 - \Delta v_0) \beta_1 + p_1 (p'_2 \Delta u_0 - \Delta v_0) \beta_2 = p_2 - p'_2 \quad (18)$$

If the value  $\beta$  is determined from them, a matrix  $K$  of Equation (16) can be determined. If the aforementioned processing is made for each of the left and right images, the projected positions of the point on the ground plane are transformed with the change in the inclination into:  $\Delta u_1' = K_1 \Delta u_1$  and  $\Delta u_r' = K_r \Delta u_r$ .

By using Equation (9), therefore, the following Formula is obtained:

$$\Delta u_r' = K_r \Delta u_r = K_r A \Delta u_l = K_r A K_l^{-1} \Delta u_l' \quad (19)$$

The value  $A$  of Equation (9) has been changed to  $A' = K_r A K_l^{-1}$  by the inclination. Equation (19) expresses the ground plane constraint with respect to the inclined plane.

The detection unit 5 detects the obstacle by using the ground plane constraint determined by the parameter computation unit 4. The corresponding point  $(u_r, v_r)$  on the right image of the case in which it is assumed that the brightness of an arbitrary point  $(u_l, v_l)$  of the left image has an intensity  $I_L(u_l, v_l)$  and that the point  $(u, v)$  exists on the ground plane is determined from Equation (19) to have an intensity  $I_R(u_r, v_r)$ .

If the point  $(u, v)$  is actually present on the ground plane, points  $P$  and  $P'$  are a set of correct corresponding points so that they basically have an equal intensity.

In short, it is decided that the point  $P$  for  $D$  of the following Formula is not 0 or for  $D > \text{Thr}$  (Thr: a preset threshold value) belongs to the obstacle region:

$$D = |I_L(u_l, v_l) - I_R(u_r, v_r)| \quad (|\cdot|: \text{Absolute value}) \quad (20)$$

In these ways, the obstacle on the ground plane can be detected at the traveling time from the stereo cameras mounted on the vehicle.

#### <Modification 1-1>

In Embodiment 1, the image input unit 1 inputs two images by arranging the two TV cameras transversely, which may be vertically arranged.

On the other hand, there may be arranged three or more cameras.

#### <Modification 1-2>

The feature extraction unit 3 has been described on the case in which the two lines on the ground plane are to be extracted, but three or more lines may be extracted.

#### <Modification 1-3>

When it is sufficient to consider only the vibration of the traveling own vehicle,  $\beta = 0$  (or  $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = 0$ ) may be assumed in Equation (16). The matrix of the righthand side of Equation (16) is  $K = I$  ( $I$ : the unit matrix), and  $A' = A$  in Equation (19). As a result, it is possible to obtain the ground plane constraint more quickly with respect to the inclined plane.

<Modification 1-4>

The detection unit 5 can take a construction shown in Fig. 8. Here, the construction is made of an image transformation unit 5-1 and a difference computation unit 5-2. The image transformation unit 5-1 transforms a right image in accordance with the following procedure. Generally, the image can be expressed as a function  $f(u, v)$  which uses the point  $(u, v)$  on the image as a variable and which has an intensity defined for each point. In the following, the image is thus expressed.

It is assumed that a stereo image shown in Fig. 9 is inputted and that the right image is expressed by  $g(u, v)$  and the transformed image is expressed by  $g'(u, v)$ . This image  $g'(u, v)$  is determined in the following manner.



$$g'(u, v) = g(u', v') \quad (21)$$

wherein  $(u', v')$  is determined from Equation 19.

Here, the image  $g'(u, v)$  is one which is obtained by the left camera when it is assumed that an arbitrary point on the image  $g(u, v)$  exists on the ground plane.

From the right image of Fig. 10, for example, there is obtained the transformed image, as shown in Fig. 10. As shown in Fig. 11, the projected points of a point on the ground plane are identical between the left image and the transformed image, but a point non-existing on the ground plane, i.e., a point on the obstacle (i.e., the preceding vehicle in this case) is projected at a location difference according to the height from the ground. Therefore, the obstacle on the ground plane is detected by taking a difference between the left image and the transformed image. Specifically, the left image is expressed by  $f(u, v)$ , and it is decided that the point  $P$  for  $D'$  of the following Formula is not 0 or for  $D' > \text{Thr}$  (Thr: a preset threshold value) belongs to the obstacle region:

$$D' = |f(u, v) - g'(u, v)| \quad (|\cdot|: \text{Absolute value}) \quad (22)$$





parameters depending upon the locations and positions of the individual cameras with respect to the ground plane and upon the focal lengths and image origins of the lenses of the individual cameras. The vectors  $H$  are predetermined from the projected points  $(u_i, v_i)$  and  $(u_i', v_i')$  ( $i = 1, 2, \dots, \text{and } N$ ) of four or more points of the ground plane on the left and right images. By using these relations, the corresponding point  $P'(u', v')$  on the right image is determined when it is assumed that an arbitrary point  $P(u, v)$  on the left image is present on the ground plane.

If the point  $P$  is present on the ground plane, the points  $P$  and  $P'$  make a set of the correct corresponding points so that their intensities are equal. When the points  $P$  and  $P'$  have different intensities, therefore, it can be decided that the point  $P$  belongs to the obstacle region. According to this method, whether an arbitrary point on the image arises from the ground plane can be decided directly only from Equation (1), and the coefficient of Equation (1) can be determined only from the projected points of four or more featuring points of the ground upon the left and right images, thereby to make unnecessary the corresponding point search between the left and right images and the camera calibration using the sample point having a known three-dimensional location.

In the case of traveling at a relatively low speed on the flat floor plane in the indoor circumstance, the vectors





Equation (2):

$$(u, v, 1)F(u, v, 1)^T = 0 \cdots (2)$$

wherein the arbitrary point P of the left image is expressed by (u, v) and the corresponding point of the right image is expressed by (u', v').

The letter F indicates a matrix of 3 x 3, as called the "fundamental matrix". The Equation (2) is expressed by the following Equation (3) by developing and rearranging it:

$$(F_{11}u + F_{12}v + F_{13})u' + (F_{21}u + F_{22}v + F_{23})v' + (F_{31}u + F_{32}v + F_{33}) = 0 \cdots (3)$$

Equation (3) expresses the epipolar line on the right image, as corresponding to the point (u, v) of the left image. Here,  $F_{ji}$  (i, j = 1, 2 and 3) designates an element of j-th row and i-th column of the matrix F and is predetermined from a set of corresponding points.

The matrix F is composed of nine elements, which are not independent but can be theoretically determined from seven or more point correspondences. The three-dimensional locations of the set of the individual corresponding points are unnecessary so that the matrix F, i.e., the epipolar constraint can be

computed relatively easily.

The lines  $l$  and  $l'$  in the individual images are parallel to each other in the three-dimensional space but intersect in the infinity called the "vanishing point" in the screens, as indicated in the white line regions taken by the individual cameras in Fig. 14.

Here will be determined a relation to hold between the corresponding points of the ground plane. As shown in Fig. 15 for explaining the corresponding points, two arbitrary points on the straight line  $l$  in the left image are designated by  $A$  and  $C$ , and two arbitrary points on the straight line  $l'$  are designated by  $B$  and  $D$ .

The corresponding points  $A'$ ,  $B'$ ,  $C'$  and  $D'$  of those four points on the right image can be easily computed by using the epipolar constraints determined in advance. Specifically, the corresponding point  $A'$  of the point  $A$  is located at the intersection between the straight line  $l$  and the epipolar line  $LA$  of the point  $A$  in the right image. Likewise, the points  $B'$ ,  $C'$  and  $D'$  can be determined as the intersections of the individual points  $B$ ,  $C$  and  $D$  with individual epipolar lines  $LB$ ,  $LC$  and  $LD$ .

The points  $A$ ,  $B$ ,  $C$  and  $D$  and their corresponding points  $A'$ ,  $B'$ ,  $C'$  and  $D'$  are given the coordinates  $(u_1, v_1)$ ,  $(u_2, v_2)$ ,  $(u_3, v_3)$  and  $(u_4, v_4)$ , and  $(u_1', v_1')$ ,  $(u_2', v_2')$ ,  $(u_3', v_3')$  and  $(u_4', v_4')$ . The following relation holds between  $(u_i, v_i)$  and



General Information	
1. Name of the organization	...
2. Address	...
3. City	...
4. State	...
5. Zip	...
6. Telephone	...
7. Fax	...
8. E-mail	...
9. Website	...
10. Year of establishment	...
11. Number of employees	...
12. Type of organization	...
13. Main activity	...
14. Other activities	...
15. Financial year	...
16. Fiscal year	...
17. Accounting year	...
18. Reporting period	...
19. Reporting date	...
20. Reporting officer	...
21. Signature	...
22. Stamp	...
23. Date	...
24. Place	...
25. Other information	...

These eight equations are solved for the vector  $h = (h_{11}, h_{12}, h_{13}, h_{21}, h_{22}, h_{23}, h_{31}, h_{32} \text{ and } h_{33})$ . If one arbitrary solution vector  $h$  satisfies the foregoing Equation (4), the  $k$ -times of the vector  $h$  also satisfies the Equation so that no generality is lost even for  $h_{33} = 1$ . From the eight equations, therefore, there can be determined the vector  $h$  which is composed of the nine elements.

By using the vector  $h = (h_{11}, h_{12}, h_{13}, h_{21}, h_{22}, h_{23}, h_{31}, h_{32}$  and  $h_{33})$  thus determined, the corresponding point  $P'(u', v')$  on the right image of the case, in which it is assumed that the arbitrary point  $P(u, v)$  of the left image exists on the ground plane, can be determined and expressed by the following Equation (5):

[illegible]

[illegible][illegible][illegible]



an obstacle detection system capable of stably detecting an obstacle existing on the ground plane.

<Embodiment 2-1>

Here will be described the construction of Embodiment 2-1 of the invention with reference to the accompanying drawings.

Figs. 17 to 20 are diagrams showing the obstacle detection system of this Embodiment.

Fig. 17 is a block diagram showing the Embodiment of the obstacle detection system. This obstacle detection system is mounted on the driver's own vehicle to be driven by the driver and is constructed to include: image input units 1 and 1 (image pickup units) composed of two stereo cameras having light receiving units 10a1 and 10b1 arranged at a predetermined spacing; an image storage unit 2 for storing the images taken by the image input units 1 and 1; a feature extraction unit 3 for extracting the white line portions from the plurality of images stored in the image storage unit 2; a difference detection unit 4 for detecting whether or not it is the obstacle region; and a height computation unit 5 for computing the height of the obstacle from the detection result of the difference detection unit 4 to detect the true obstacle region.

Here, the detection of an obstacle assumes a situation that a pedestrian, a preceding vehicle or an obstacle to exist on the ground plane is to be detected under the conditions of the vibration to occur when the own vehicle travels and the





region is a true obstacle.

More specific description will be made with reference to Fig. 18 for explaining the actions of the height computation unit 5.

Let it be assumed that there is in the obstacle region image an obstacle region having an intensity difference larger than the standard value set by the user. Here: a point in the lower side of the obstacle region is designated by  $U_b$ ; a point in the upper side is designated by  $U_t$ ; and the distance (as taken in the longitudinal direction of the Drawing) between the point  $U_b$  and the point  $U_t$  is designated by  $dv$ . Moreover, the vanishing point at which the straight lines  $l$  and  $l'$  intersect is designated by  $U_\infty$ , and the distance (as taken in the longitudinal direction of the Drawing) from the point  $U_b$  to the vanishing line (i.e., the projected image of the ground plane in the infinite distance) is designated by  $V$ . Here, the obstacle region extracted is composed of a plurality of pixels by using one of square pixels dividing the obstacle region image longitudinally and transversely, as the minimum unit.

Here, when the image input unit 1 has a small angle of roll, the vanishing line of the ground plane is substantially aligned with the scan-line which passes through the vanishing point  $U_\infty$  of the two straight lines  $l$  and  $l'$ . By the vibration of the image input unit 1 during the traveling of the own vehicle and the change in the inclination of the ground, strictly





distance V between the lower side point Ub and the vanishing line of the ground plane.

When the height of each obstacle detected on the image from the ground plane is computed by using Equation (8) and is smaller than a preset height, i.e., a threshold value  $\gamma_{min}$ , this polygonal region detected is not the true obstacle region but is eliminated as a noise.

Here, the threshold value  $\gamma_{min}$  takes a value to be set by the position where the image input unit 1 is disposed and from the minimum of the height of the obstacle to be detected, and is set as follows when the height H of the image input unit 1 from the ground is 1.5 m and when an obstacle having a height of  $h = 1$  m or more is to be detected:

$$\gamma = h/H = 1 \text{ [m]} / 1.5 \text{ [m]} \approx 0.67 - - - (9).$$

Next, the output unit 6 presents the user the information such as the position of the true obstacle detected, in terms of a voice, a light (or image) or a vibration, and transmits the information to the control system for an autonomous traveling.

According to Embodiment 2-1 thus far described, it is possible to correctly detect obstacles on the ground plane in spite of vibrations, road inclination, shadows, road textures, and illumination change.

<Embodiment 2-2>

Here will be described a construction of Embodiment 2-2

of the obstacle detection system of the invention with reference to Figs. 20 to 23.

In the following individual Embodiments, the same components as those of Embodiment 2-1 are designated by the same reference numerals so that their repeated description will be omitted.

This Embodiment is characterized: in that the difference detection unit is constructed to include an image transformation unit 4-1 and a difference computation unit 4-2; and in that the left camera image is converted into the image in the view point of the right camera assuming that all image points arise from the ground plane and the obstacle areas are detected comparing the right image to the transferred one.

Fig. 20 is a block diagram of Embodiment 2-2. The difference detection unit 4 is constructed to include: the image transformation unit 4-1 to which the signal is inputted from the feature detection unit 3; and the difference computation unit 4-2 for outputting the signal to the height computation unit 5. Here, the image input unit 1, the image storage unit 2, the feature extraction unit 3, the height computation unit 5 and the output unit 6 are similar in their constructions and actions to those of Embodiment 2-1.

The actions of Embodiment 2-2 thus constructed will be described with reference to Figs. 21 to 23.

In the following, the description will be made on the



the left camera image. But, a point non-existing on the ground plane, that is, a point of an obstacle (e.g., a preceding vehicle in this case) is projected on a different position according to the height from the ground.

By taking a difference for each corresponding pixel value between the left camera image and the transformed image, therefore, the obstacle on the ground plane is detected.

If the left camera image is expressed by  $f(u, v)$ , the following expression can be made:

$$D' = |f(u, v) - g'(u, v)| \quad - - - - - (11).$$

(wherein  $| \quad |$  designate an absolute value).

Considering  $D' \neq 0$  or the errors, it is decided that the point  $(u, v)$  for  $D' > \text{Thr}$  (wherein Thr designates a preset threshold value) belongs to the obstacle region.

On the other hand, the difference detection unit 4 of Embodiment 2-1 has detected the difference between the two images by taking the difference in the pixel value between the corresponding pixels between the individual images, but the difference computation unit 4-2 may detect the difference between the individual images by setting a window of  $(2w+1) \times (2w+1)$  (wherein  $w$  designates a natural number) for each point and by computing a normalized cross correlation  $C$  of the intensities in the window.

The correlation  $C$  of the point  $(u, v)$  of two images  $F(u, v)$  and  $G(u, v)$  is expressed by the following Formula:



between the stereo images and the location of the vanishing line of the ground plane can be made invariable. For example, the user may mount the TV cameras and may once preset the transformation parameters and the vanishing line of the ground plane.

When the geometric relations between the stereo cameras and the ground plane are thus invariable, the feature extraction unit of Embodiments 2-1 and 2-2 can be made unnecessary.

#### <Modification 2-1>

Here, the invention should not be limited to the foregoing Embodiments but can naturally be modified in various manners without departing from the gist thereof. For example, the image input units are exemplified by the two TV cameras arranged on the left and right sides. However, the image input units can be arranged at any locations of the rear portion of the own vehicle, for example, or three or more image input units can be arranged, if their light receiving units are spaced from each other and can take the surroundings of the own vehicle simultaneously as the images.

#### <Modification 2-2>

The feature extraction unit sets the transformation parameters by determining the corresponding relations of the arbitrary four points but can use five sets or more corresponding relations. In this case, ten or more simultaneous equations may be solved by using the least square method.

<Modification 2-3>

The region to be extracted by the feature extraction unit has been described assuming the two white straight lines indicating the lane to be traveled. When the ground is curved, however, the white lines are also curved. In this case, the obstacle can be detected likewise by extracting the white lines as the curves.

<Modification 2-4>

The ground plane is assumed to be flat, but the obstacle can be detected likewise for the flat plane even if the ground plane has a vertical curve.

<Modification 2-5>

An automobile or a motorbike has been assumed as the driver's own vehicle. However, the obstacle detection system can be mounted on an object of an aeroplane or helicopter to detect an obstacle existing on a takeoff or landing place.

<Modification 2-6>

The obstacle detection system has been exemplified by arranging two cameras at a spacing. It is, however, natural that the obstacle detection system is modified to arrange a plurality of light receiving units optically separately but to concentrate the cameras at one place.

<Embodiment 3>

An obstacle detection system according to Embodiment 3 of the invention is constructed to comprise: a first image pickup





Here will be described the actions of the aforementioned detection unit with reference to Figs. 24 to 28.

Here, the numbers of Equations are independent of those of Embodiments 1 and 2 and are newly started from (1).

The actions of the pixel corresponding unit are specified by transforming the first image taken by the first image pickup unit into the image, as seen from the view point of the second image pickup unit, thereby to obtain the transformed image.

Here, the parameters to be used for this transformation are assumed: to be once obtained in advance such that a plurality of image pickup units or cameras and the ground plane being traveled by the driver's own vehicle have a typical geometric relation (for example, when a still vehicle is arranged on the ground plane having no inclination); and to be unchanged during the traveling of the vehicle, i.e., while the actions to detect the obstacle are being made.

First of all, a vehicle carrying two cameras 10a and 10b are arranged on a flat ground plane having no inclination, as shown in Fig. 24 presenting a perspective view for explaining the actions. On the ground plane, two white lines are drawn, as designated by 1 and 1', in parallel with each other in the running direction of the vehicle.

It is assumed that the mutual locations and positional relations of those two cameras 10a and 10b are unknown to the obstacle detection system whereas only the epipolar constraint

is known, and that the locations, positions and epipolar constraint of the cameras 10a and 10b are invariable during the traveling of the vehicle.

Here, the epipolar constraint holds for the general stereo images and specifies the state in which an arbitrary point P of the (left) image taken by the camera 10a is constrained to exist on a straight line containing a corresponding point P' of the (right) image taken by the camera 10b, as illustrated in Fig. 25 for explaining the epipolar constraint. This straight line is called the "epipolar line".

When the individual cameras are arranged to have their optical axes in parallel, for example, the corresponding point of the arbitrary point P of the left image exists on the same scan-line in the right image so that the epipolar line and the scan-line are aligned with each other. The epipolar constraint depends upon the geometric relationship between the stereo cameras and upon the intrinsic parameters of the individual cameras, i.e., the focal lengths and the principal points. Therefore, no change in the epipolar constraint means that the relative locational and positional relations and the intrinsic parameters of the stereo cameras do not change during the traveling of the vehicle.

This epipolar constraint is formulated into the following Equation (2):

$$(u, v, 1)F(u, v, 1)^T = 0 \cdots (2)$$

three-dimensional space but intersect in the so-called "vanishing point" on each image, as indicated in the white line regions taken by the individual cameras in Fig. 26.

Here will be determined a relation to hold between the corresponding points of the ground plane. As shown in Fig. 27 for explaining the corresponding points, two arbitrary points on the straight line  $l$  in the left image are designated by  $A$  and  $C$ , and two arbitrary points on the straight line  $l'$  are designated by  $B$  and  $D$ .

The corresponding points  $A'$ ,  $B'$ ,  $C'$  and  $D'$  of those four points on the right image can be easily computed by using the epipolar constraints determined in advance. Specifically, the corresponding point  $A'$  of the point  $A$  is located at the intersection between the straight line  $l$  and the epipolar line  $LA$  of the point  $A$  in the right image. Likewise, the points  $B'$ ,  $C'$  and  $D'$  can be determined as the intersections of the individual points  $B$ ,  $C$  and  $D$  with individual epipolar lines  $LB$ ,  $LC$  and  $LD$ .

The points  $A$ ,  $B$ ,  $C$  and  $D$  and their corresponding points  $A'$ ,  $B'$ ,  $C'$  and  $D'$  are given the coordinates  $(u_1, v_1)$ ,  $(u_2, v_2)$ ,  $(u_3, v_3)$  and  $(u_4, v_4)$ , and  $(u_1', v_1')$ ,  $(u_2', v_2')$ ,  $(u_3', v_3')$  and  $(u_4', v_4')$ . The following relation holds between  $(u_i, v_i)$  and  $(u_i', v_i')$  ( $i = 1, 2, 3$  and  $4$ ):

$$u'_i = \frac{h_{11}u_i + h_{12}v_i + h_{13}}{h_{31}u_i + h_{32}v_i + h_{33}}, v'_i = \frac{h_{21}u_i + h_{22}v_i + h_{23}}{h_{31}u_i + h_{32}v_i + h_{33}} \dots (4)$$

These eight equations are solved for the vector  $h = (h_{11}, h_{12}, h_{13}, h_{21}, h_{22}, h_{23}, h_{31}, h_{32} \text{ and } h_{33})$ . If one arbitrary solution vector  $h$  satisfies the foregoing Equation (4), the  $k$ -times of the vector  $h$  also satisfies the Equation so that no generality is lost even for  $h_{33} = 1$ . From the eight equations, therefore, there can be determined the vector  $h$  which is composed of the nine elements.

By using the vector  $h = (h_{11}, h_{12}, h_{13}, h_{21}, h_{22}, h_{23}, h_{31}, h_{32} \text{ and } h_{33})$  thus determined, the corresponding point  $P'(u', v')$  on the right image of the case, in which it is assumed that the arbitrary point  $P(u, v)$  of the left image exists on the ground plane, can be determined and expressed by the following Equation (5):

$$u' = \frac{h_{11}u + h_{12}v + h_{13}}{h_{31}u + h_{32}v + h_{33}}, v' = \frac{h_{21}u + h_{22}v + h_{23}}{h_{31}u + h_{32}v + h_{33}} \dots (5)$$

In the transformation thus made, as in the transformed image example of Fig. 28, the left camera image (a) of the stereo





include: image input units 1 and 1 (image pickup units) composed of two stereo cameras having light receiving units or lenses 1a and 1b arranged at a spacing; an image information storage unit 2 for storing the image informations taken by the image input units 1 and 1; a detection unit 3 for detecting the obstacle from the taken images by processing (as will be detailed) the taken images, to obtain the detected result as the obstacle region image; and a vehicle detection unit having a detection unit for detecting a generally wedge-shaped region from the obstacle region images.

Here, the detection of an obstacle assumes a situation that a pedestrian, a preceding vehicle or an obstacle to exist on the ground plane is to be detected under the conditions of the vibration to occur when the own vehicle travels and the change in the inclination on the ground plane. It is also assumed that the geometrical relation of the two cameras and the construction at the time when the stereo cameras are mounted on the own vehicle are neither changed nor varied from those of the aforementioned time when the image transformation parameters are computed. It is further assumed that the image taken by the image input unit 1 arranged on the lefthand side is a first image or a left camera image whereas the image taken by the image input unit 1 arranged on the righthand side is a second image or a right camera image.

The locations for mounting the image input units 1 and



1 should not be limited to the ceiling side of the vehicle, but the image input units 1 and 1 may be fixed at any located in the vehicle, as exemplified by the obstacle detection system of Embodiment 3-1 of Fig. 30 if the drive of the user is not troubled and if the running direction (as indicated by an arrow 11) of the own vehicle 10. However, the locations for fixing the image input units 1 and 1 should not change during the traveling of the own vehicle.

Here will be described the actions of the obstacle detection system thus constructed.

First of all, the region in the traveling direction of the own vehicle is taken simultaneously into to images by using two TV cameras.

Next, the image information storage unit 2 stores the two images, as inputted from the image input units 1 and 1, in the image memory.

Next, in the detection unit 3, as shown in Fig. 31 for explaining the actions of the detection unit of Embodiment 3-1, the pixel corresponding unit 3a reads the left camera image or the first image (or the image information), as stored in the image information storage unit 2, and determines the corresponding pixel in the right camera image corresponding to a predetermined pixel in the left camera image, on the basis of the relation (i.e., the ground plane constraint) holding between the projected locations of an arbitrary pixel on the

ground plane predetermined at the still time of the own vehicle, thereby to perform the matching processing (as should be referred to Fig. 31(C)). At this time, assuming that the arbitrary pixel exists on the ground plane in the left camera image, the corresponding pixel in the right camera image is determined. This matching processing is performed for all the pixels that individually construct the left camera image and the right camera image.

The intensity difference image forming unit 3b determines the intensity difference of the corresponding pixel, as corresponding to the pixel in the left camera image, of the right camera image.

The discrimination image forming unit 3c discriminates whether the intensity difference of each pixel in the intensity difference image is no less or less than the standard value preset by the user. As a result of this discrimination, the pixel having an intensity no less than the standard value belongs to the obstacle region, and the pixel having an intensity no more than the standard value belongs not to the obstacle region but to the ground plane, thereby to divide the obstacle region and the non-obstacle region such as the ground plane. Here, the intensity difference of each corresponding pixel, as obtained from the left camera image and the right camera image, is obtained as the discrimination image.

Next, the vehicle detection unit 5 detects the region,

in which the set of pixels has a general wedge shape, from the discrimination image, and decides the detected region as the obstacle region. The reason why the region for detecting obstacle is formed into the general wedge shape is empirical but is that when the left camera image is transformed into the right camera view point, the intensity of the pixel in the region having an increasing height on the side of the vehicle is not equalized but formed into the general wedge shape. On the other hand, this wedge shape is intensified on the two ends of the obstacle in the transverse direction of the image.

The region of the general wedge shape is detected from the discrimination image by scanning the wedge-shaped template stored in the vehicle detection unit 5, as shown in Fig. 33, in the raster direction of the discrimination image to perform the template matching. In this template matching, the size of the template used is smaller than the obstacle region to be detected.

Here, the wedge-shaped region and the template are so arranged that the locational relation between a side H existing generally in the scan-line direction of the left camera image (or the right camera image) and an apex P opposed to the side H has the side H at an upper location of the image.

The lower location of the image of the general wedge shape in the discrimination image, as detected by the vehicle detection unit 5, that is, the location of the apex P is at the contact



Here will be described a construction of Embodiment 3-2 of the obstacle detection system of the invention with reference to Figs. 34 to 37.

In the following Embodiment 3-2, the same components as those of Embodiment 3-1 are designated by the same reference numerals so that their repeated description will be omitted.

This Embodiment 3-1 is characterized: in that the detection unit is constructed to include an image transformation unit 3-1 and a difference computation unit 3-2; and in that the left camera image is converted into the image in the view point of the right camera so that the obstacle is detected by comparing an arbitrary region of the transformed image and the corresponding region, as corresponding to the arbitrary region, of the right camera image.

Fig. 34 is a block diagram of Embodiment 3-2. The detection unit 3 is constructed to include: the image transformation unit 3-1 to which the signal is inputted from the image information storage unit 2; and the difference computation unit 3-2 for outputting the signal to the vehicle detection unit 4. Here, the image input unit 1, the image information storage unit 2 and the vehicle detection unit 4 are similar in their constructions and actions to those of Embodiment 3-1.

The actions of Embodiment 3-2 thus constructed will be described with reference to Figs. 35 to 37.

In the following, the description will be made on the case in which the image is transformed from the right camera image, but the transformed image may be likewise obtained from the left camera image.

An arbitrary point  $(u, v)$  in the right image is used as a variable, and a function having an intensity defined for each point is expressed by  $f(u, v)$ .

As shown in Fig. 34 for explaining the actions of Embodiment 3-2, the left image and the right image are inputted by the individual image input units 1.

The right image is expressed by  $g(u, v)$ , and its transformed image is expressed by  $g'(u, v)$ . The following Equation is determined from Equation (5):

$$g'(u, v) = g(u', v') \quad - - - - - (10).$$

The term  $g'(u, v)$  is the left camera image of the case in which an arbitrary point on the right image  $g(u, v)$  exists on the ground plane.

As shown in Fig. 36 for explaining the actions of Embodiment 3-2, for example, if the right camera image is transformed by using the aforementioned Equation, it is possible to obtain the transformed image, as shown on the righthand side of Fig. 36.

As shown in Fig. 37 for explaining the actions of Embodiment 3-2, on the other hand, the projected point of a point existing on the ground plane is identical in the transformed image to



$$C = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{\eta=-w}^w \sum_{\xi=-w}^w \frac{(F(u+\xi, v+\eta) - a_1)(G(u+\xi, v+\eta) - a_2)}{\sigma_1 \sigma_2} \dots (12)$$

wherein:  $N = (2w+1) \times (2w+1)$ ;  $a_1$  and  $a_2$  designate the averages of the intensities in the window of the two images; and  $\sigma_1^2$  and  $\sigma_2^2$  designate the variances in the intensities in the window of the two images. In this case, it is decided that the point  $(u, v)$  for  $C < \text{Thr}$  belongs to the obstacle region.

The detected obstacle region is sent as the obstacle region image to the vehicle detection unit 5.

According to Embodiment 2-1 thus far described, it is possible to correctly detect obstacles on the ground plane in spite of vibrations, road inclination, shadows, road textures, and illumination change.

<Modification 3-1>

Here, the invention should not be limited to the foregoing Embodiments but can naturally be modified in various manners without departing from the gist thereof.

For example, the image input units are exemplified by the two TV cameras, but the image input units can be arranged at any locations, or three or more image input units can be arranged, if their light receiving units are arranged to have parallel optical axes and spaced from each other and can take





fat. Even if the ground plane is assumed to be curved, however, the obstacle can be detected, for example, by approximating the curve into a plurality of sectional planes, by preparing a plurality of image transformation parameters and by performing the image transformation sectionally on the image.

#### <Embodiment 4>

Here will be described Embodiment 4 of the invention with reference to Figs. 39 to 49.

Here, the numbers of Equations are independent of those of Embodiments 1, 2 and 3 and are newly started from (1).

In Embodiment 4, there are imagined situations that an obstacle existing on a ground plane such as a pedestrian, a preceding vehicle or a parked vehicle is detected by two left and right stereo cameras mounted on a vehicle (as will be called the "own vehicle"), as shown in Fig. 39, and that the time for the obstacle to contact with the own vehicle is computed.

Fig. 40 shows a schematic construction of the obstacle detection system according to Embodiment 4. This obstacle detection system is constructed to include an image input unit 1, an image storage unit 2, a feature extraction unit 3, a detection unit 4 and a contact time computation unit 5.

In the obstacle detection system, a stereo images are obtained by two cameras, the mutual locations/positions and the focal lengths / principal points of the lenses are unknown, and an equation (as will be called the "ground plane constraint")

expressing a relation to hold between the projected positions of a point of the ground plane, as determined at a still time, upon the projected locations is used to discriminate whether or not each point on the image has a height from the ground plane, thereby to separate the obstacle region and the ground region. Moreover, the time for the obstacle to contact with the own vehicle is computed from the locus of the obstacle on the image.

Fig. 41 shows a coordinate system of the own vehicle.

In the own vehicle coordinate system: the advancing (or longitudinal) direction of the own vehicle is taken in the Y-axis; the transverse and vertical directions are taken in the X-axis and the Z-axis, respectively; and the ground plane is taken in the X-Y plane. In Embodiment 4, it is premised that both the own vehicle and the obstacle travel along the two white lines (or straight lines  $l$  and  $l'$ ) on the two road ends.

(Image Input Unit 1)

The image input unit 1 takes two images by using two left and right TV cameras. The locations and positions of those two cameras with respect to the own vehicle coordinate system and the focal lengths and the principal points of the lenses of the individual cameras may be unknown, but it is assumed in Embodiment 4 that the individual cameras are fixed on the vehicle and not changed during the traveling.

(Image Storage Unit 2)

The image storage unit 2 stores an image memory with the two images inputted from the image input unit 1.

(Feature Extraction Unit 3)

The feature extraction unit 3 detects the two straight lines  $l_1$  and  $l_2$ , as shown in Fig. 42, by using one of the two images stored in the image storage unit 2, as a standard image (which will be exemplified by the left image in the following).

The point of intersection (or the projected point of the infinite points of the two straight lines upon the images, as will be called the "vanishing point") is expressed by  $u_0(u_0, v_0)$ . This straight line detection is performed by using the edge extraction processing and the Hough transformation.

(Detection Unit 4)

The detection unit 4 detects the obstacle by using the constraint (as will be called the "ground plane constraint") to hold between the projected points of the point of the ground plane upon the left and right images. Here will be described this ground plane constraint.

If the projected points of an arbitrary point  $(X, Y)$  of the ground plane (or the  $X$ - $Y$  plane) upon the left and right images are designated by  $(u, v)$  and  $(u_r, v_r)$ , the following relation generally holds:

$$u = \frac{h_{11}X + h_{12}Y + t_1}{h_{31}X + h_{32}Y + t_3}, \quad v = \frac{h_{21}X + h_{22}Y + t_2}{h_{31}X + h_{32}Y + t_3} \quad (1)$$

$$u_r = \frac{h'_{11}X + h'_{12}Y + t'_1}{h'_{31}X + h'_{32}Y + t'_3}, \quad v_r = \frac{h'_{21}X + h'_{22}Y + t'_2}{h'_{31}X + h'_{32}Y + t'_3} \quad (2)$$

wherein  $h = (h_{11}, h_{12}, \dots, \text{and } t_3)^T$  and  $h' = (h'_{11}, h'_{12}, \dots, \text{and } t'_3)^T$  are parameters relating to the three-dimensional locations and positions of the individual cameras with respect to the own vehicle coordinate system, and the focal lengths and the principal points of the lenses mounted on the individual cameras.

If  $X$  and  $Y$  are eliminated from Equations (1) and (2), the following Formula is obtained:

$$u_r = \frac{H_{11}u + H_{12}v + H_{13}}{H_{31}u + H_{32}v + H_{33}}, \quad v_r = \frac{H_{21}u + H_{22}v + H_{23}}{H_{31}u + H_{32}v + H_{33}} \quad (3)$$

wherein  $H = (H_{11}, H_{12}, \dots, \text{and } H_{33})^T$  are constants expressed by  $h$  and  $h'$ .

From this Formula, there can be determined the corresponding point on the right image when the point  $(u, v)$  on the left image is assumed to be on the ground plane.

In other words, assuming that the point  $(u, v)$  on the left image is on the ground plane, the corresponding point  $(u_r, v_r)$  on the right image is determined by the aforementioned

Equation. This Equation will be called the "ground plane constraint".

Here, the parameters  $H = (H_{11}, H_{12}, \dots, \text{and } H_{33})^T$  are predetermined at the still time.

Here will be described this method.

First of all, an  $N (\geq 4)$  number of featuring points (e.g., the intersection point of the straight lines drawn on the ground plane or the corner points of paint) on the ground plane are extracted from the left image.

Next, there are determined the corresponding points of the individual extracted featuring points on the right image. Here, these featuring point extractions and the correspondences may also be performed by pointing the points on the images with the mouse. These  $N$  sets of corresponding relations satisfy the Equation (3) individually so that a  $2N$  number of simultaneous equations are obtained.

The parameter  $H$  can be determined by solving those simultaneous equations for  $H$ .

Here will be described the method for detecting the obstacle by using the ground plane constraint.

The corresponding point  $A' (u_r, v_r)$  on the right image of the case in which it is assumed that the brightness of an arbitrary point  $A(u, v)$  of the left image has an intensity  $I_L(u, v)$  and that the point  $A$  exists on the ground plane is determined from Equation (3) to have an intensity  $I_R(u_r, v_r)$ .

If the point  $(u, v)$  is actually present on the ground plane, the points A and A' make a set of correct corresponding points (that is, the points A and A' are the projected points of the same point of the ground plane) so that the point A and the point A' basically have an equal intensity. For the following Formula, therefore,  $\text{Diff} = 0$ :

$$\text{Diff} = |I_L(u, v) - I_R(u_r, v_r)| \quad (|\cdot| : \text{Absolute value}) \quad (4)$$

Unless  $\text{Diff} = 0$ , on the contrary, the point A( $u, v$ ) and the point A'( $u_r, v_r$ ) do not belong to the set of correct corresponding points, so that the point  $(u, v)$  is not present on the ground plane, i.e., the point on the obstacle.

After these series of processing were performed on all the points of the standard image, it is possible to detect the obstacle region.

At this time, considering an error of some extent as the standard for deciding the obstacle, it may be decided that a point for  $\text{Diff} > \text{Thr}$  belongs to the obstacle region.

Here, Thr designate a preset threshold value.

From the stereo images shown in Fig. 43, for example, there is detected an obstacle region, as shown in the lower side of Fig. 43.

(Contract Time Measurement Unit 5)

The contact time measurement unit 5 measures the time (i.e., the time to contact) for the own vehicle to contact with the obstacle, from the locus (or the time change of the location of the obstacle) of the obstacle on one image (as will be called the "standard image" which is exemplified by the left image in Embodiment 4) of the stereo images.

First of all, the time to contact will be described in the following.

The denominator of Equation (1) is designated by D. That is:

$$D = h_{31}X + h_{32}Y + t_3 \quad - - - - - (5).$$

The denominator D indicates the distance, i.e., the depth in the optical axis between a contact point T (X, Y) of the obstacle with the ground plane and the viewpoint C of the standard camera.

The depths of the contact points T' and T of the obstacle with the ground plane at instants t-dt and t are designated by D' and D, respectively. Here, the time period, for which the depth becomes 0 when the obstacle continues movements between the instants t-dt and t with respect to the own vehicle coordinate system, is defined by a time to contact  $t_c$ .

Fig. 45 shows the time change in the depth.

The time period from the present time t to the time for the depth to become 0 is the time to contact  $t_c$ , as illustrated



in Fig. 45. From the similar relation of the two hatched triangles, the following relation is obtained:

$$\text{from } \frac{t_c}{D} = \frac{dt}{D' - D} \quad (6)$$

$$t_c = \frac{D}{D' - D} dt = \frac{1}{D'/D - 1} dt = \frac{1}{\gamma - 1} dt \quad (7)$$

wherein  $\gamma = D'/D$ .

In short, the time to contact  $t_c$  can be determined from the ratio  $\gamma$  of the depth between the two times.

Here will be described the method for computing the time to contact, from the positions of the obstacle regions at the individual times, as determined by the detection unit 4.

It is assumed that the obstacle region is detected, as shown in Fig. 46, on the standard image at the present time  $t$  and the preceding time  $t-dt$ , and that an arbitrary point on the lowermost line (or the boundary line between the obstacle region and the ground region) detected at the time  $t$  is expressed by  $u = (u, v)$ . The position  $u' (u', v')$  of the point  $u = (u, v)$  at the time  $t-dt$  can be determined as the point of intersection between the straight line joining the points  $u_0$  and  $u$  and the boundary line at the time  $t-dt$  between the obstacle region and the ground region.

On the other hand, it is assumed that the locations of the obstacle on the ground plane at the times  $t-dt$  and  $t$  are expressed by  $X' = (X, Y+dY)$  and  $X = (X, Y)$ .

In Embodiment 4, it is assumed that the own vehicle and the obstacle move in the Y-axis (or in the same traveling direction), so that the obstacle at individual times is located to have the same X-coordinate. The depth to the point  $X'$  is expressed, as follows:

From formula (1), 
$$D' = h_{31}X + h_{32}(Y + dY) + t_3 \quad (8)$$

$$\begin{cases} Dv = h_{21}X + h_{22}Y + t_2 \\ D'v' = h_{21}X + h_{22}(Y + dY) + t_2 \end{cases} \quad (9)$$

From the foregoing two formulae as well as formulae (5) and (8),

$$D'v' - Dv = h_{22}(Y' - Y) = \frac{h_{22}}{h_{32}}(D' - D) \quad (10)$$

Here, the projected point of the infinite point on the straight lines  $l$  and  $l'$  parallel to the Y-axis is expressed by  $u_0 = (u_0, v_0)$ .  $Y \rightarrow \infty$  in Equation (1):



hereinbefore, the stereo images taken by the stereo cameras are processed to detect the obstacle in dependence upon the presence or absence of the height from the ground plane. Without being influenced by the fluctuation of the brightness or the influence of the shadow, therefore, it is possible to detect the obstacle such as the preceding vehicle or the pedestrian from the images. Moreover, it is possible to eliminate the calibrations requiring a long time and much work and the depth search (or the corresponding search) of the high computation cost, which have troubled the stereo vision of the prior art, so that high practical effects can be obtained.

<Modification 4-1>

In Embodiment 4, the image input unit 1 inputs two images by arranging the two TV cameras transversely, which may be vertically arranged.

On the other hand, there may be arranged three or more cameras.

<Modification 4-2>

The feature extraction unit 3 has been described on the case in which the two lines on the ground plane are to be extracted, but three or more lines may be extracted. Alternatively, a line absent from the ground plane, such as the line on a guard rail may be extracted if the direction vector is identical.

<Modification 4-3>

The detection unit 4 can take a construction shown in

Fig. 47.

Here, the construction is made of an image transformation unit 4-1 and a difference computation unit 4-2.

The image transformation unit 4-1 transforms a right image in accordance with the following procedure. Generally, the image can be expressed as a function  $f(u, v)$  which uses the point  $(u, v)$  on the image as a variable and which has an intensity defined for each point. In the following, the image is thus expressed.

It is assumed that a stereo image shown in Fig. 48 is inputted, and the right image expressed by  $g(u, v)$  and the transformed image expressed by  $g'(u, v)$  are determined. This image  $g'(u, v)$  is determined in the following manner.

$$g'(u, v) = g(u_r, v_r) \quad (15)$$

wherein  $(u_r, v_r)$  is determined from Equation (3). Here, the image  $g'(u, v)$  is one which is obtained by the left camera when it is assumed that all the points on the image  $g(u, v)$  exist on the ground plane.

From the right image of Fig. 49, for example, there is obtained the transformed image, as shown in Fig. 49.

As shown in Fig. 50, the projected points of a point on the ground plane are identical between the left image and the



wherein:  $N = (2w+1) \times (2w+1)$ ;  $a_1$  and  $a_2$  designate the averages of the intensities in the window of the two images;  $\sigma_1^2$  and  $\sigma_2^2$  designate the variances in the intensities in the window of the two images; and  $-1 \leq C \leq 1$ .

In this case, it is decided that the point  $(u, v)$  for  $C < \text{Thr}$  belongs to the obstacle region. Here,  $\text{Thr}(\leq 1)$  designate a present threshold value.

<Modification 4-5>

In Embodiment 4, the two white lines on the two ground ends are extracted as the straight lines, but the white lines are curves when the ground is curved.

In this case, the obstacle can be likewise detected if the white lines are extracted as the curves.

<Modification 4-6>

The description has been made assuming that the ground plane is flat, but the obstacle can be detected as in the case of the flat plane even for the curved plane.

<Modification 4-7>

The movements parallel to the lane have been assumed for the own vehicle and the obstacle. However, the obstacle detection system can also be applied to the case in which the movements are not parallel (e.g., when the lane is to be changed).

<Modification 4-8>

Although Embodiment 4 has been described on the obstacle





the fluctuation of brightness or the influence of a shadow. On the other hand, the constraint to hold in the geometric relation between the ground plane and individual cameras is determined from only two white lines of the two ground ends so that the obstacle on the ground plane can be quickly detected to provide high practical effects even with the vibration during the traveling or the inclination of the ground plane.

Even when the vibration occurs in the traveling own vehicle or when the ground being traveled has an inclination, on the other hand, the true obstacle on the ground plane can be stably detected without erroneously detecting the pattern drawn on the ground plane being traveled.

Moreover, the stable obstacle detection can be made without being influenced by the vibration to be applied to the image pickup units or the inclination of the ground plane being traveled.

On the other hand, the images taken by a plurality of cameras are processed to detect the obstacle in dependence upon the presence or absence of the height from a plane in a three-dimensions, so that the obstacle can be detected from the images without being influenced by the fluctuation in the brightness or the shadow. On the other hand, high practical effects can be obtained because there are unnecessary the camera calibrations requiring a long time and much work and the depth search (or the corresponding search) of the high computation



WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An obstacle detection system comprising:
  - a plurality of TV cameras for inputting multiple images;
  - an image storage unit for storing a plurality of images inputted from said TV cameras;
  - a feature extraction unit for extracting lines existing on a plane in a three-dimensional space, from the images;
  - a parameter computation unit for determining a relation to hold between the projected positions of an arbitrary point on said plane upon the individual images, from the lines extracted by said feature extraction unit; and
  - a detection unit for detecting a region absent from said plane, by using the relation computed by said parameter computation unit.
2. An obstacle detection system according to Claim 1, wherein said TV cameras are unknown on their relative positions and orientations and on their focal lengths and principal points.
3. An obstacle detection system according to Claim 1 or 2, wherein the relation to hold between the projected points of an arbitrary point on the plane in the three-dimensional space upon the individual images is expressed by a two-dimensional affine transformation thereby to determine the

affine transformation parameters.

4. An obstacle detection system according to any of Claims 1 to 3,

wherein said feature extraction unit extracts a plurality of lines, as existing on the plane in the three-dimensional space and parallel to each other in the three-dimensional space, from the images, and determines the vanishing points of said lines.

5. An obstacle detection system according to any of Claims 1 to 3,

wherein said feature extraction unit extracts a plurality of lines, as existing on the plane in the three-dimensional space and parallel to each other in the three-dimensional space, from the images, and determines the inclinations of said lines on the images and the vanishing points of said lines.

6. An obstacle detection system comprising:

a plurality of image pickup units having light receiving units disposed on a driver's own vehicle at a substantial spacing from each other for taking the regions, to which the light receiving units are directed, simultaneously as images;

an image storage unit for storing the images taken by said image pickup units;







a generally wedge-shaped set of pixels in said discrimination image as an obstacle region.

9. An obstacle detection system according to Claim 8, wherein said detection unit decides that the lowermost pixel in said wedge-shaped region of said discrimination image is either at a point of contact between said obstacle region in said first or second image, as corresponding to said discrimination image, and the ground being traveled by said own vehicle, or at a portion of said obstacle region and the closest to said own vehicle.

10. An obstacle detection system according to Claim 8 or 9, wherein said detection unit decides that such one of said generally wedge-shaped region existing generally in the scan-line direction of said first and second images, as corresponding to said discrimination image, that its side is at a higher location of said first and second images than the apexes opposed thereto, is the obstacle region.

11. An obstacle detection system according to Claim 8, wherein said detection unit decides one pair of wedge-shaped regions generally of the same shape, as located at a spacing on the generally identical scan-line in said discrimination image, and decides the region between said paired







point on said reference image when the arbitrary point on said standard image is assumed to be on said plane, to detect said non-existing point from a similarity of the surrounding intensities of said arbitrary point and said corresponding point.

17. An obstacle detection method comprising:

an image storage step of storing a plurality of images inputted from a plurality of TV cameras;

a feature extraction step of extracting a line existing in a plane of a three-dimensional space, from the images;

a parameter computation step of determining a relation to hold between the projected positions of an arbitrary point in said plane upon the individual images, from the line extracted at said feature extraction step; and

a detection step of detecting a region absent from said plane, by using the relation computed at said parameter computation step.

18. An obstacle detection method according to Claim 17,

wherein said TV cameras are unknown on their relative locations and positions and on their focal lengths and principal points.

19. An obstacle detection method according to Claim 17 or

18,

wherein said parameter computation step expresses the relation to hold between the projected points of an arbitrary point of the plane in the three-dimensional space upon the individual images by a two-dimensional affine transformation thereby to determine the affine transformation parameters.

20. An obstacle detection method according to any of Claims 17 to 19,

wherein said feature extraction step extracts a plurality of lines, as existing on the plane in the three-dimensional space and parallel to each other in the three-dimensional space, from the images, and determines the vanishing points of said lines.

21. An obstacle detection method according to any of Claims 17 to 19,

wherein said feature extraction step extracts a plurality of lines, as existing on the plane in the three-dimensional space and parallel to each other in the three-dimensional space, from the images, and determines the inclinations of said lines on the images and the vanishing points of said lines.

22. An obstacle detection method comprising:

a plurality of image pickup steps of taking the regions,

to which light receiving units disposed on a driver's own vehicle at a substantial spacing from each other are directed, simultaneously as images;

an image storage step of storing the images taken by said image pickup steps;

a feature extraction step of extracting such ones of the regions taken by said image pickup steps as correspond to parallel members disposed generally in parallel with each other on a plane, as can be traveled by said own vehicle, from the first image taken by said first image pickup step and the second image taken by said second image pickup step, as stored in said image storage step, to determine a point of intersection at which said extracted regions intersect in said first and second images;

a difference detection step of determining the corresponding region in the second image, as corresponding to an arbitrary region in said first image, assuming that said arbitrary region is caused by said plane, from the epipolar constraint to hold between said extracted region and said first and second images, to compare the intensities of said arbitrary region and said corresponding region, thereby to extract the region having a substantially different intensity as an obstacle region to obtain an obstacle region image from the extracted result; and

a height computation step of extracting a polygonal region,



region said polygonal region of a threshold or higher value of the ratio which is determined from the vertical size of said polygonal region in said obstacle region image and the size from the lower end of said polygonal region to the scan-line set in said obstacle region image.

24. An obstacle detection method comprising:

a first image pickup step and a second image pickup step of obtaining a first image information of a first image and a second image information of a second image, respectively, by taking the surrounding region of a driver's own vehicle substantially simultaneously as images formed of a set of pixels from light receiving units arranged at a spacing on the own vehicle;

an image information storage step of storing said first image information and said second image information;

an intensity difference image forming step of forming an intensity difference image by determining the corresponding pixels in said second image of the second image information, as assuming that an arbitrary pixel of said first image of said first image information stored in said image information storage step exists on the ground plane being traveled by said own vehicle, to determine the intensity difference between said arbitrary pixel and said corresponding pixel;

a discrimination image forming step of obtaining a

discrimination image by discriminating each pixel in said intensity difference image into a pixel having an intensity difference no less than a standard value and a pixel having an intensity difference less than the standard value; and

a decision step of detecting and deciding a region having a generally wedge-shaped set of pixels in said discrimination image as an obstacle region.

25. An obstacle detection method according to Claim 24,

wherein said detection step decides that the lowermost pixel in said wedge-shaped region of said discrimination image is either at a point of contact between said obstacle region in said first or second image, as corresponding to said discrimination image, and the ground being traveled by said own vehicle, or at a portion of said obstacle region and the closest to said own vehicle.

26. An obstacle detection method according to Claim 24 or 25,

wherein said detection step decides that such one of said generally wedge-shaped region existing generally in the scan-line direction of said first and second images, as corresponding to said discrimination image, that its side is at a higher location of said first and second images than the apexes opposed thereto, is the obstacle region.



27. An obstacle detection method according to Claim 24,  
wherein said detection step decides one pair of  
wedge-shaped regions generally of the same shape, as located  
at a spacing on the generally identical scan-line in said  
discrimination image, and decides the region between said paired  
wedge-shaped regions as the obstacle.

28. An obstacle detection method comprising:

an image input step of inputting and storing at least  
two images of different pickup points;

a feature extraction step of extracting a projected point  
of a motion of an object, as stands still or moves on a plane  
in a three-dimensional space with respect to the pickup point  
of a standard image, upon said standard image corresponding  
to an infinite point, by employing one of the images stored  
by said image input step as said standard image and the other  
as a reference image;

a detection step of calculating a corresponding point  
on said reference image when it is assumed that an arbitrary  
point on said standard image is on said plane, to detect a point  
non-existing on said plane from the intensity difference between  
said arbitrary point and said corresponding point; and

a contact time computation step of computing the time  
period for the point non-existing on said plane to come to the



and positions of their pickup points and on their focal lengths and principal points.

32. An obstacle detection method according to any of Claims 28 to 31,

wherein said detection step computes the corresponding point on said reference image when the arbitrary point on said standard image is assumed to be on said plane, to detect said non-existing point from a similarity of the surrounding intensities of said arbitrary point and said corresponding point.

# ABSTRACT

An obstacle detection system using stereo cameras mounted on a vehicle, to detect an obstacle existing on a ground plane at a high speed and in a high precision even with the stereo cameras being uncalibrated and with a vibration during a traveling and a change in the inclination of the ground plane. The obstacle detection system comprises: a plurality of uncalibrated TV cameras for inputting stereo images; an image storage unit 2 for storing a plurality of images inputted from the TV cameras; a feature extraction unit 3 for extracting a plurality of mutually parallel lines existing on the ground plane; a parameter computation unit 4 for determining a relation to hold between the projected positions of an arbitrary point of the ground plane upon the individual images, from the plurality of lines extracted by the feature extraction unit 3; and a detection unit 5 for detecting an object having a height from the ground plane, by using the relation determined by the parameter computation unit 4.

FIG. 1

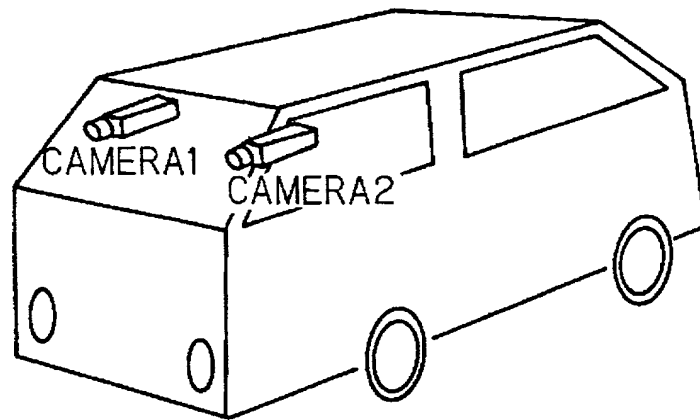


FIG. 2

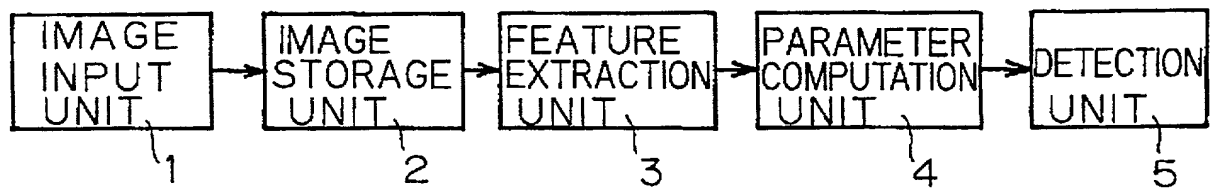


FIG. 3

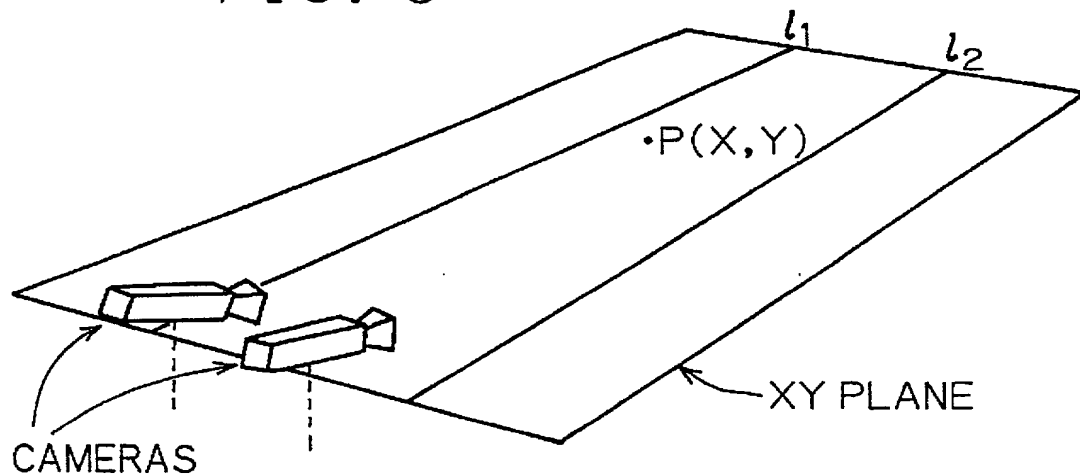


FIG. 4

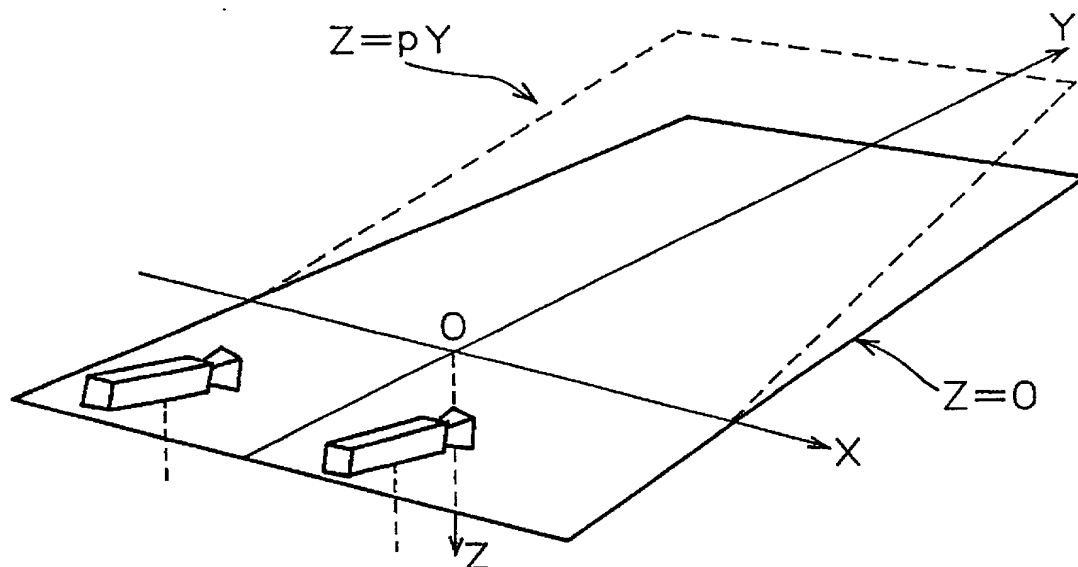


FIG. 5

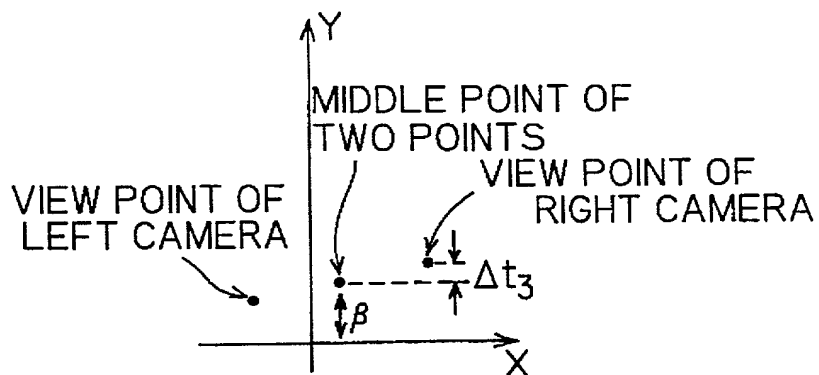


FIG. 6

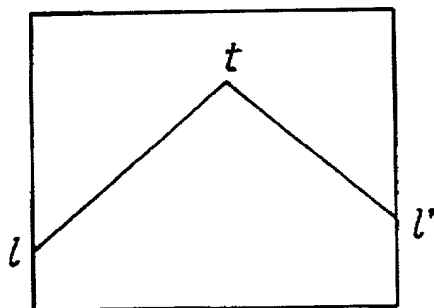


FIG. 7

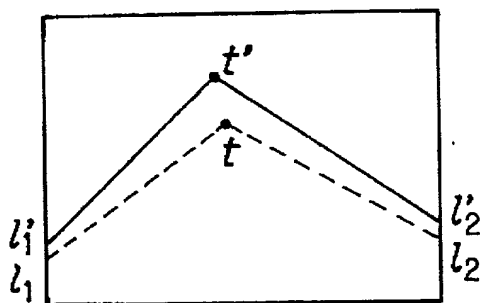


FIG. 8

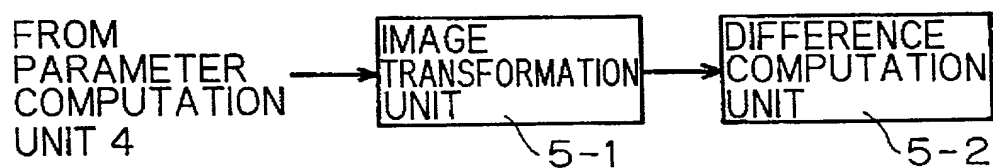
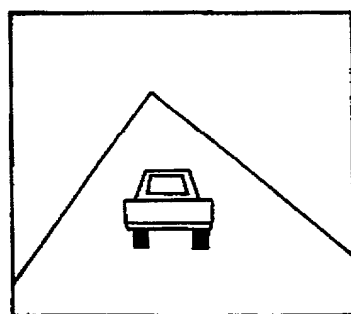
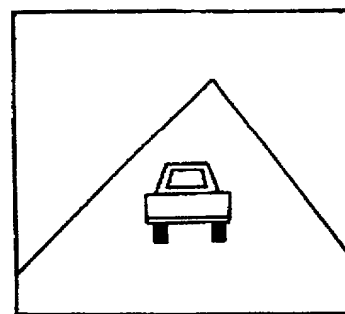


FIG. 9



LEFT IMAGE



RIGHT IMAGE

FIG. 10

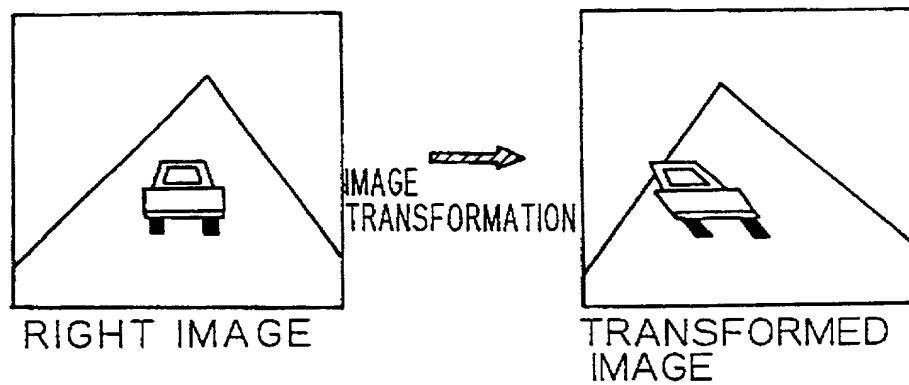


FIG. 11

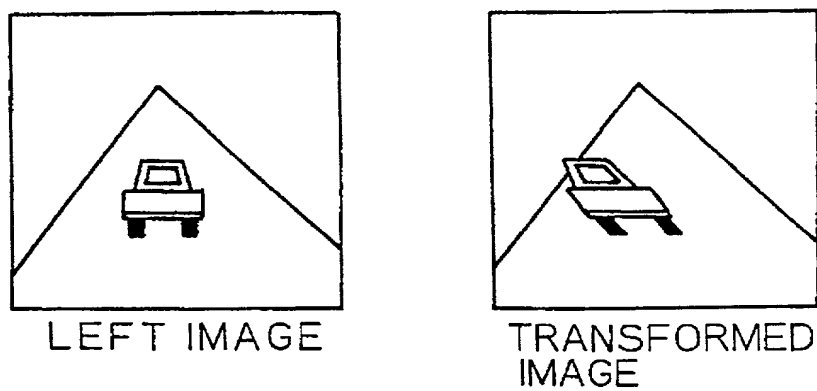




FIG. 12

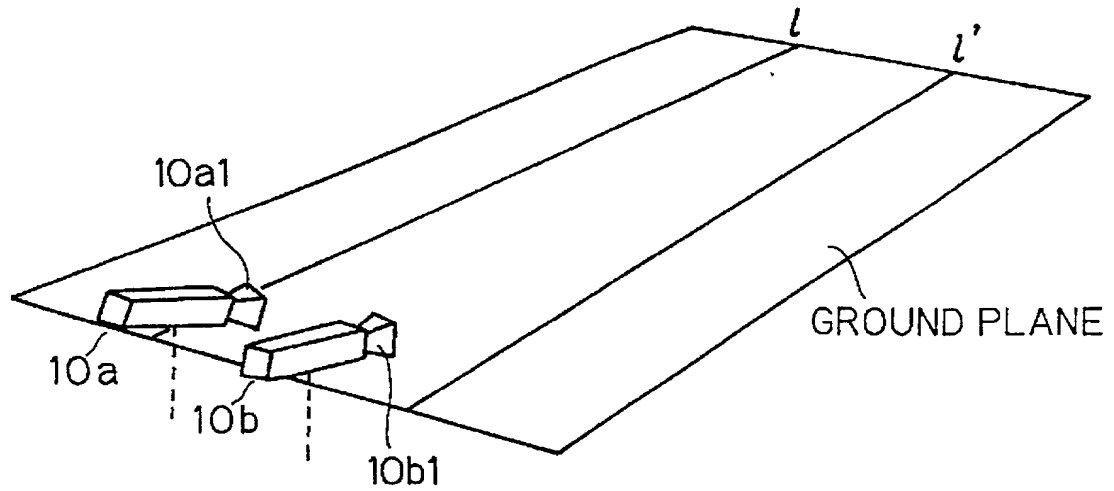


FIG. 13

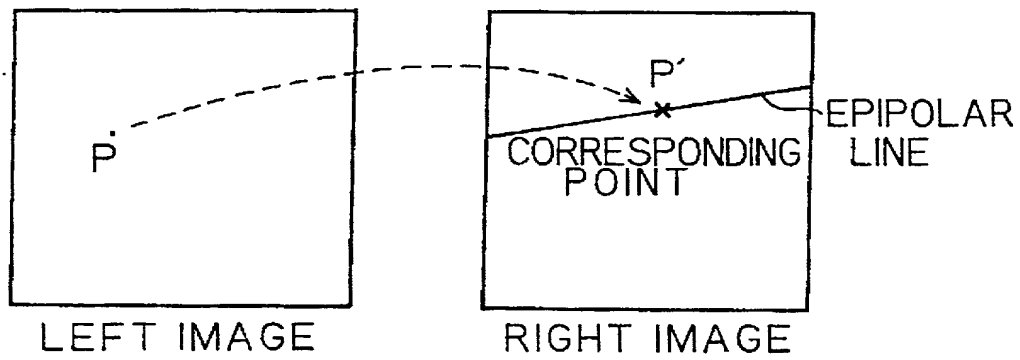
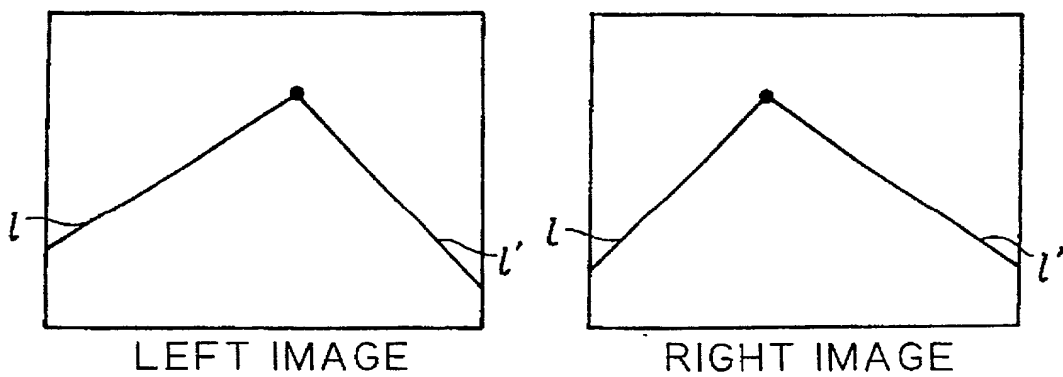


FIG. 14



00160" ST669960

FIG. 15

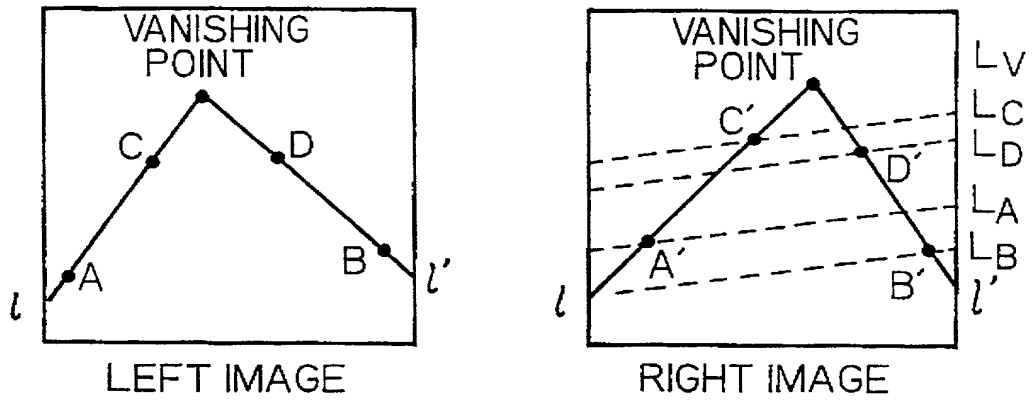
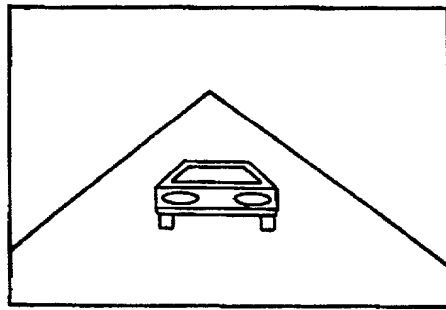
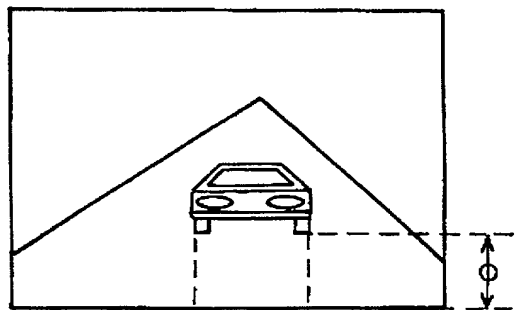


FIG. 16 A



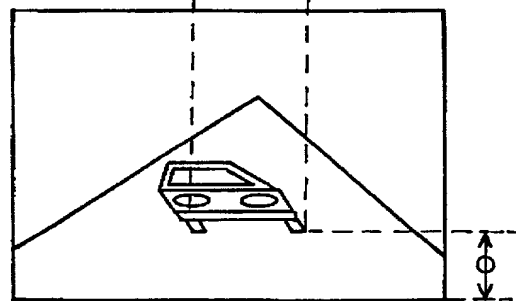
LEFT IMAGE

FIG. 16 B



RIGHT IMAGE

FIG. 16 C



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graph TD
    I1[IMAGE INPUT UNIT 1] --> IS[IMAGE STORAGE UNIT 2]
    I2[IMAGE INPUT UNIT 1] --> IS
    IS --> FE[FEATURE EXTRACTION UNIT 3]
    FE --> DD[DIFFERENCE DETECTION UNIT 4]
    DD --> HC[HEIGHT COMPUTATION UNIT 5]
    HC --> OU[OUTPUT UNIT 6]
  
```

FIG. 18

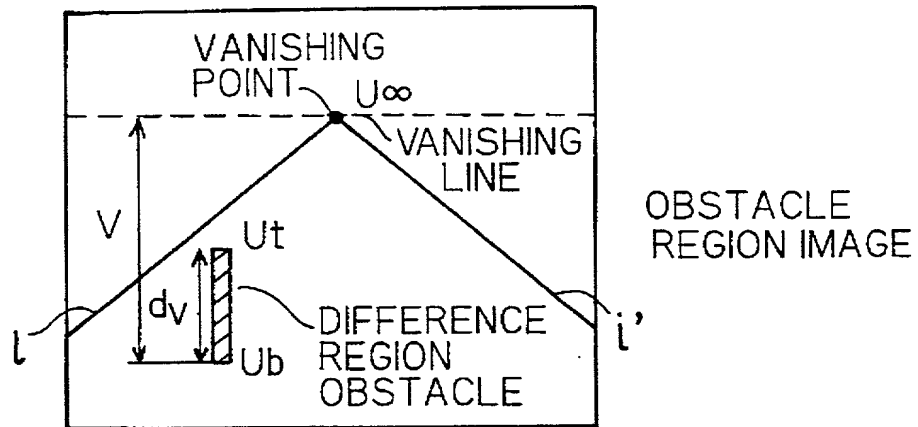


FIG. 19

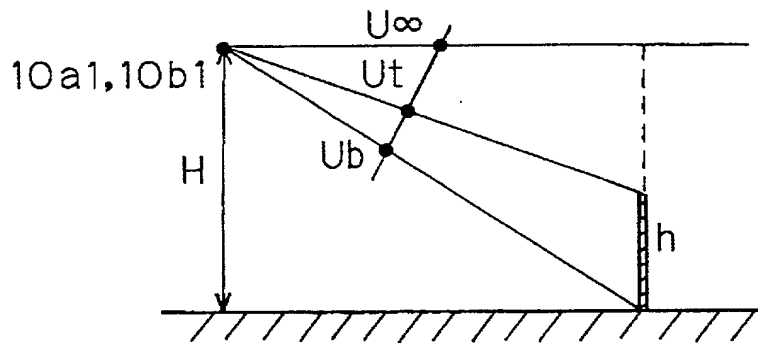


FIG. 20

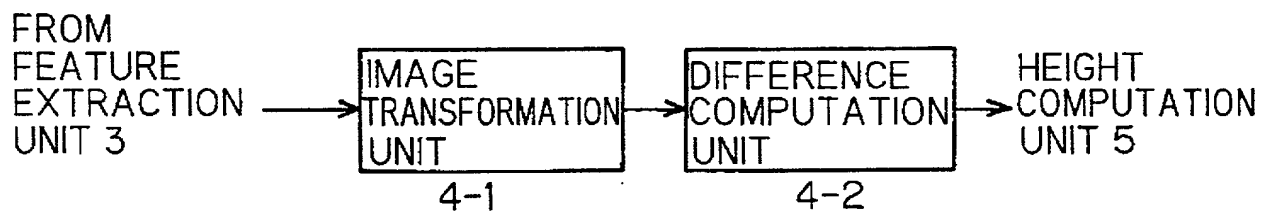
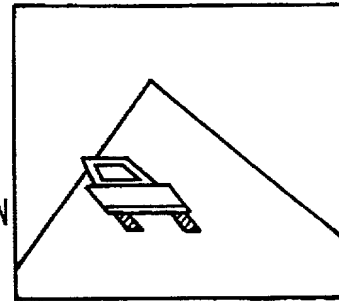


IMAGE  TRANSFORMATION



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IMAGE

FIG. 24

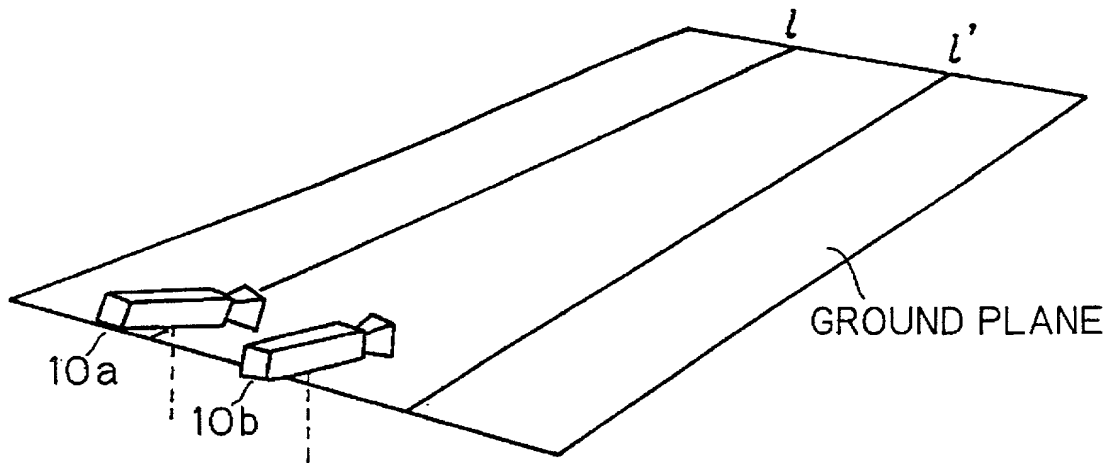


FIG. 25

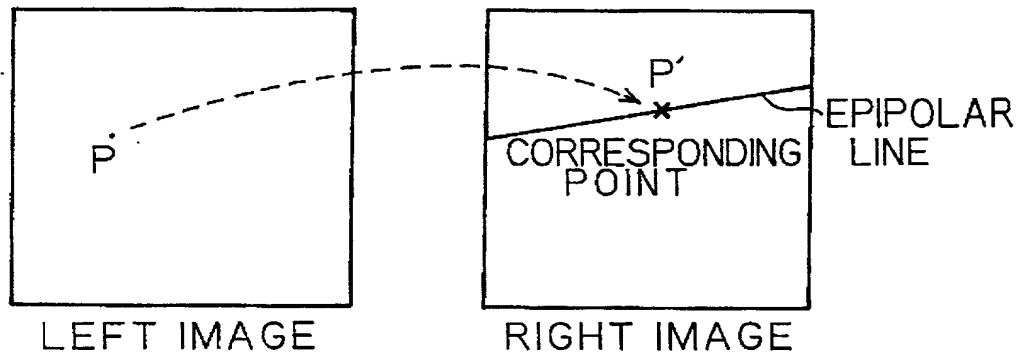


FIG. 26

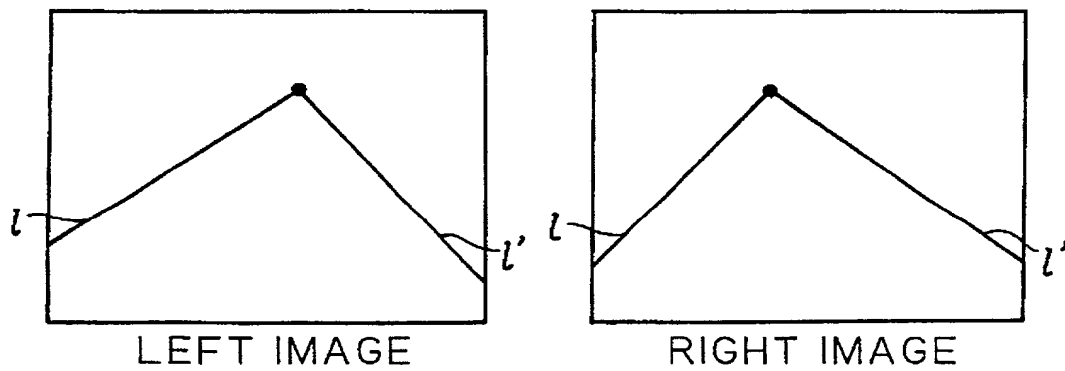


FIG. 27

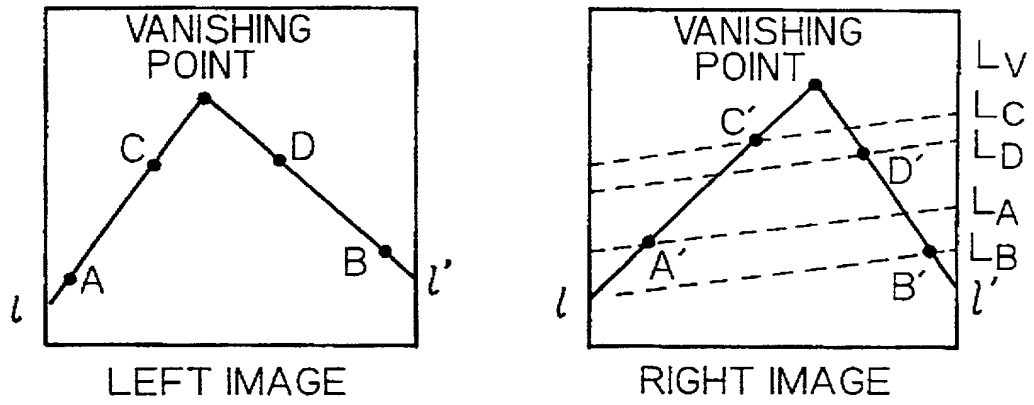
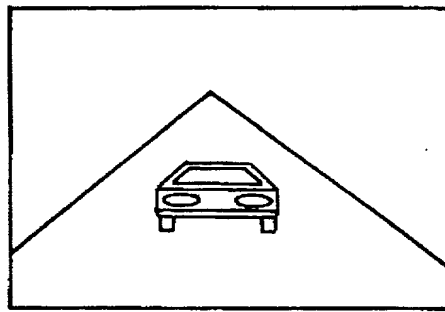
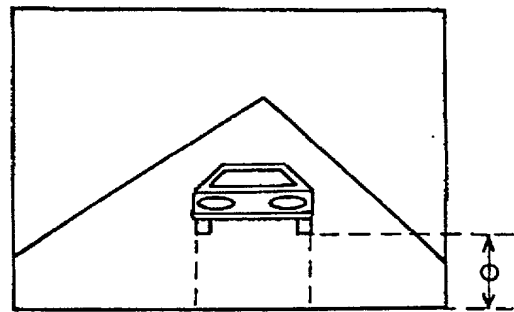


FIG. 28A



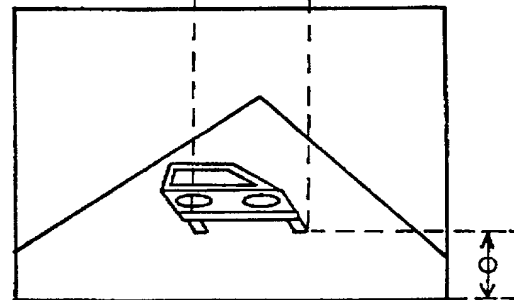
LEFT IMAGE

FIG. 28B



RIGHT IMAGE

FIG. 28C



TRANSFORMED IMAGE

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FIG. 29

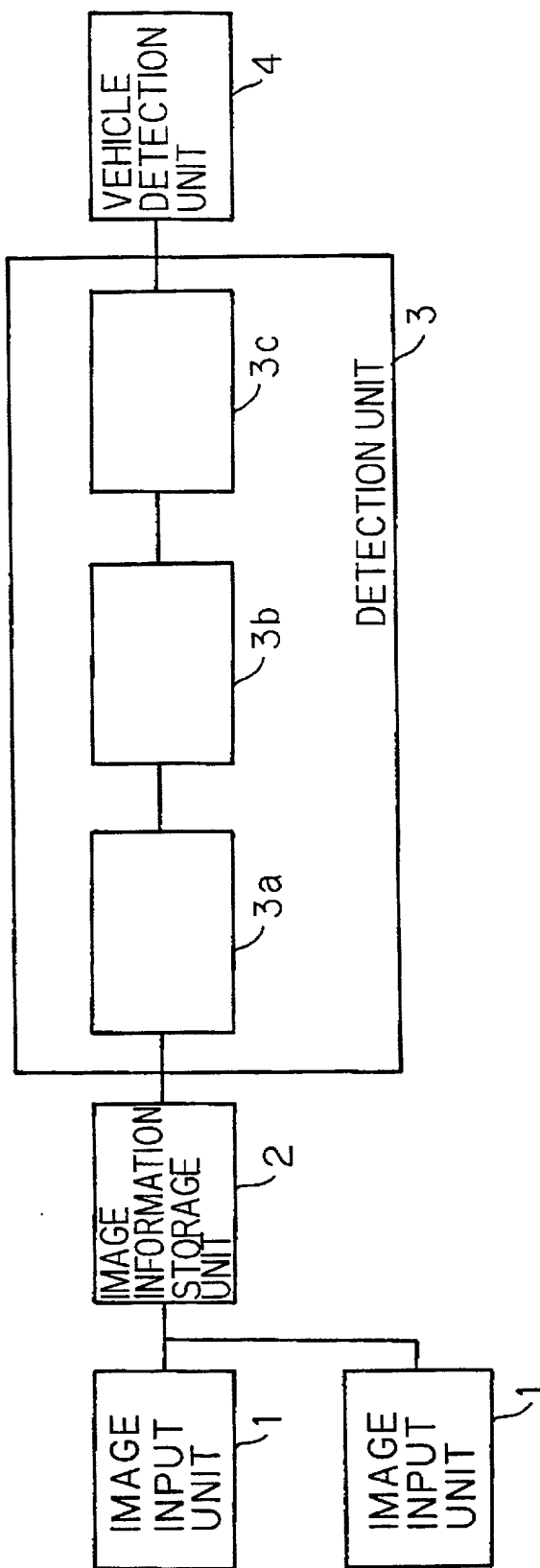




FIG. 30

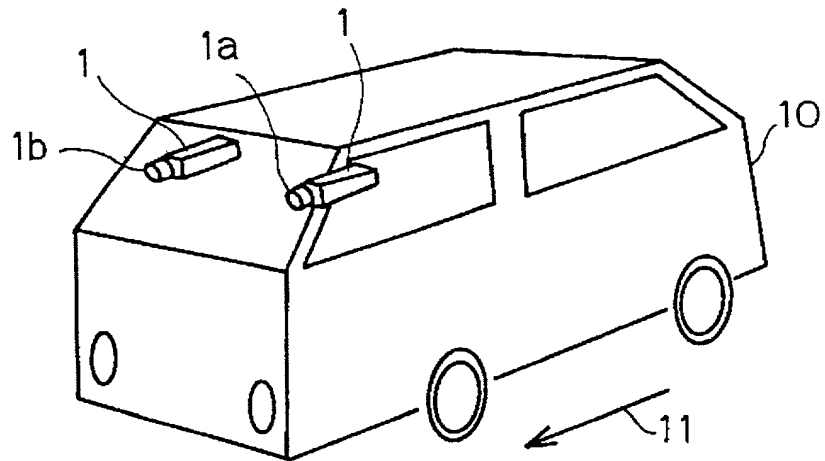


FIG. 31A

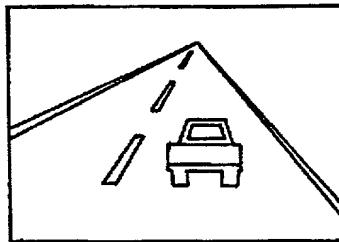


FIG. 31B

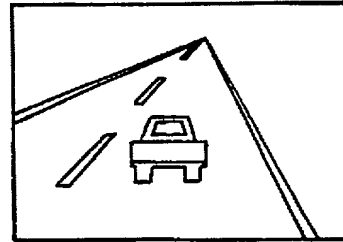
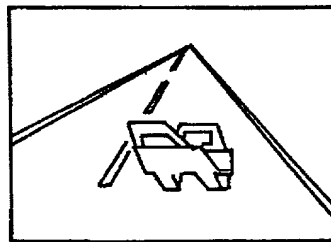


FIG. 31C



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FIG. 32

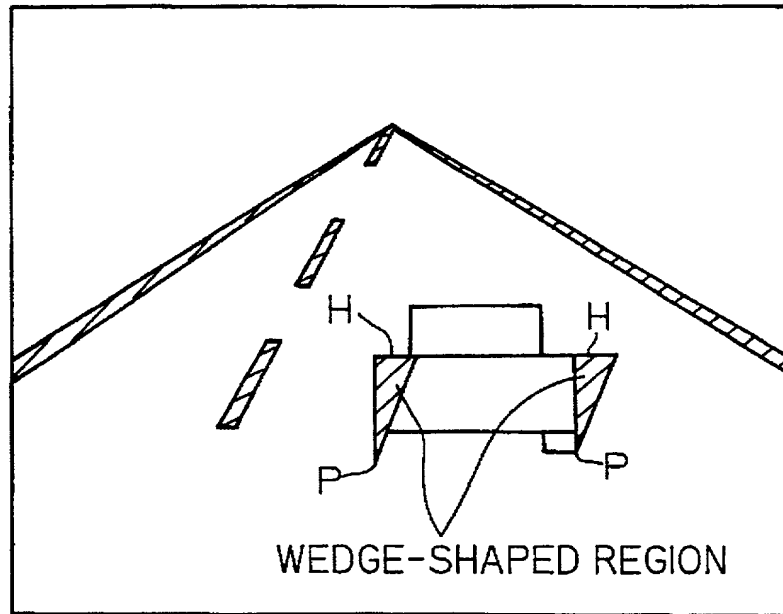


FIG. 33

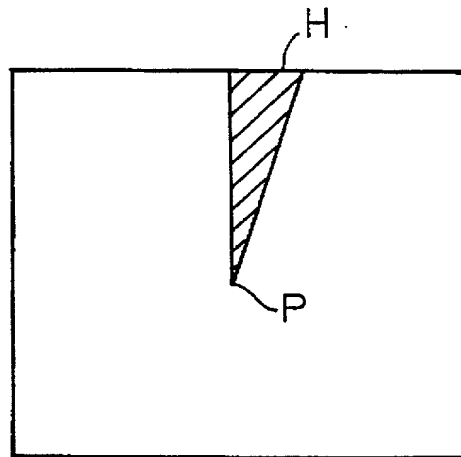


FIG. 34

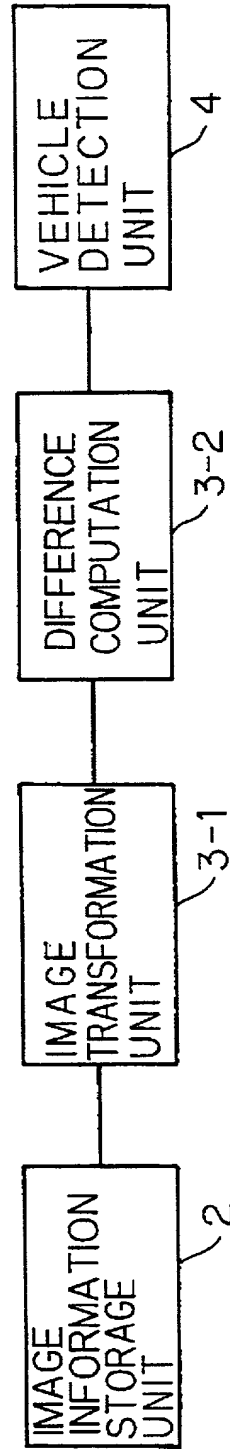


FIG. 35

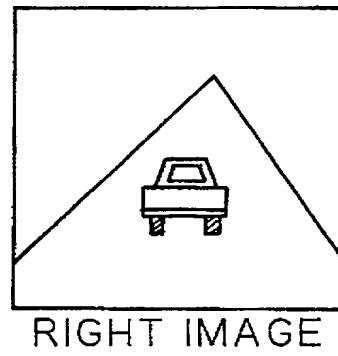
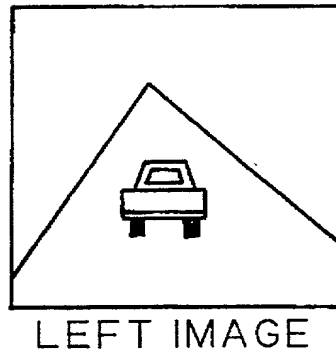


FIG. 36

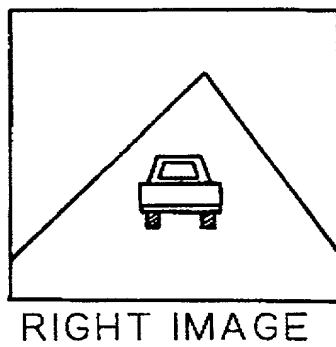


IMAGE  
TRANSFORMATION

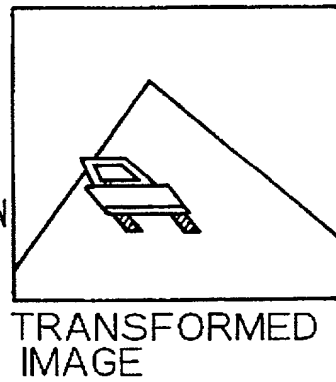
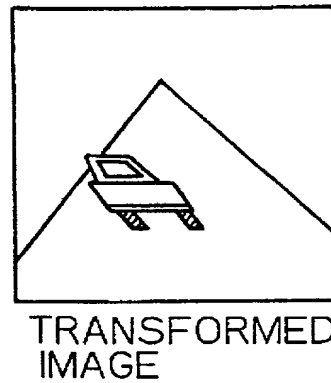
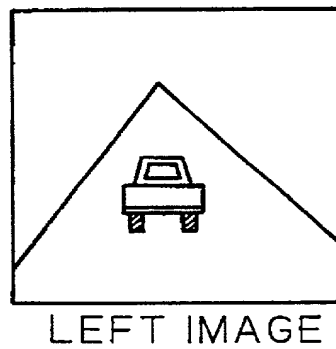


FIG. 37



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FIG. 38

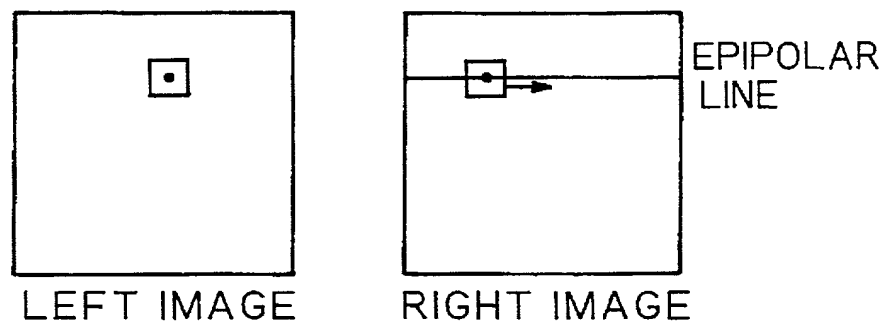


FIG. 39

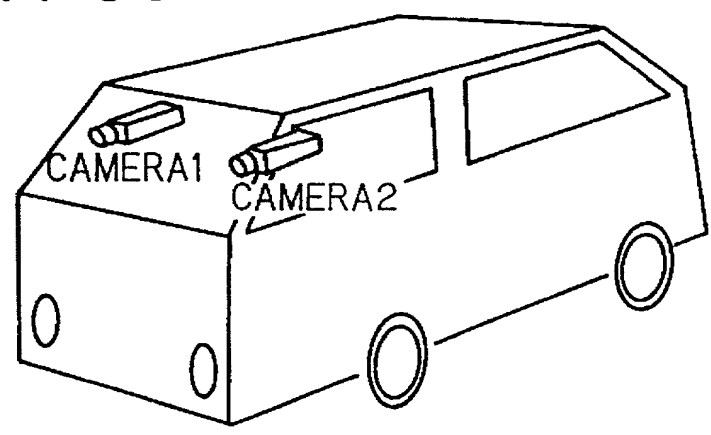


FIG. 40

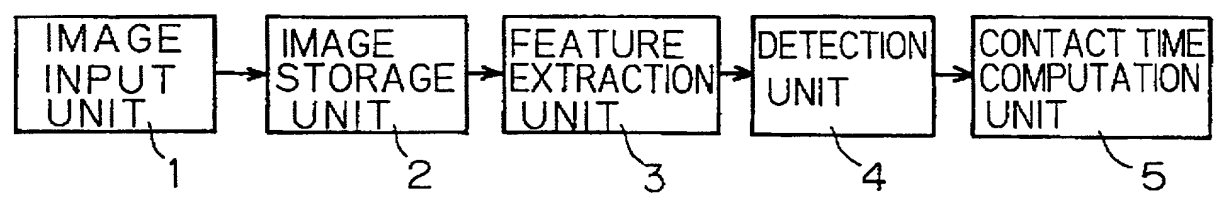


FIG. 41

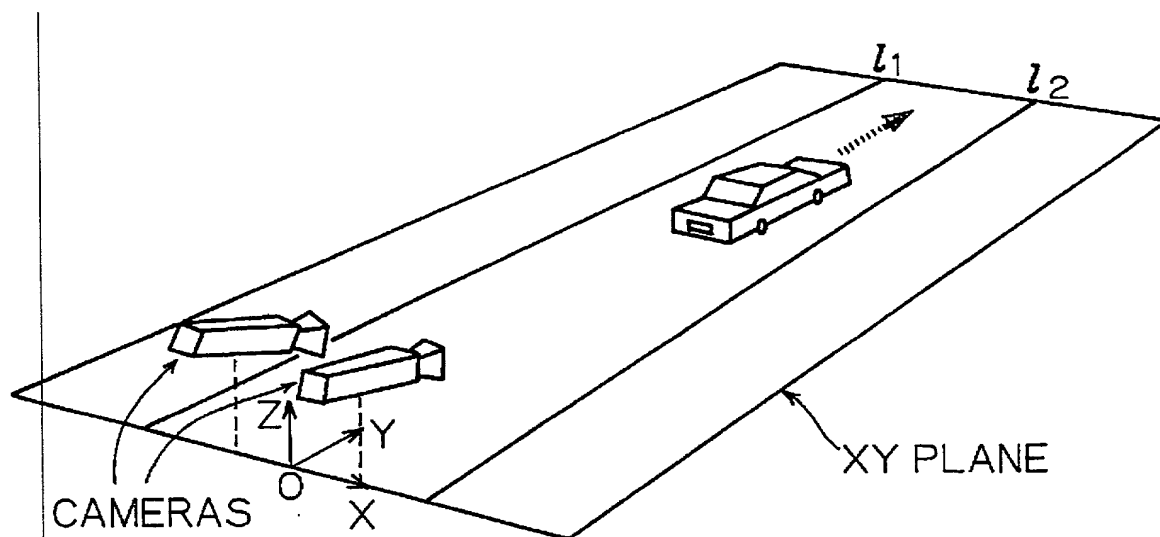


FIG. 42

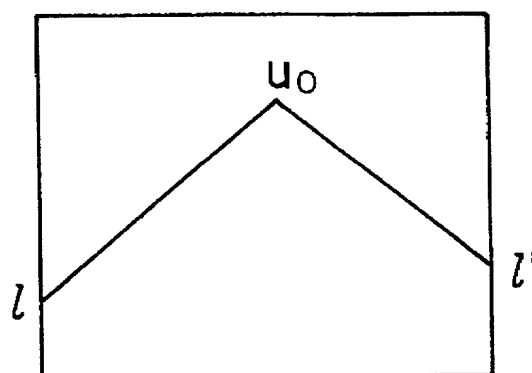


FIG. 43

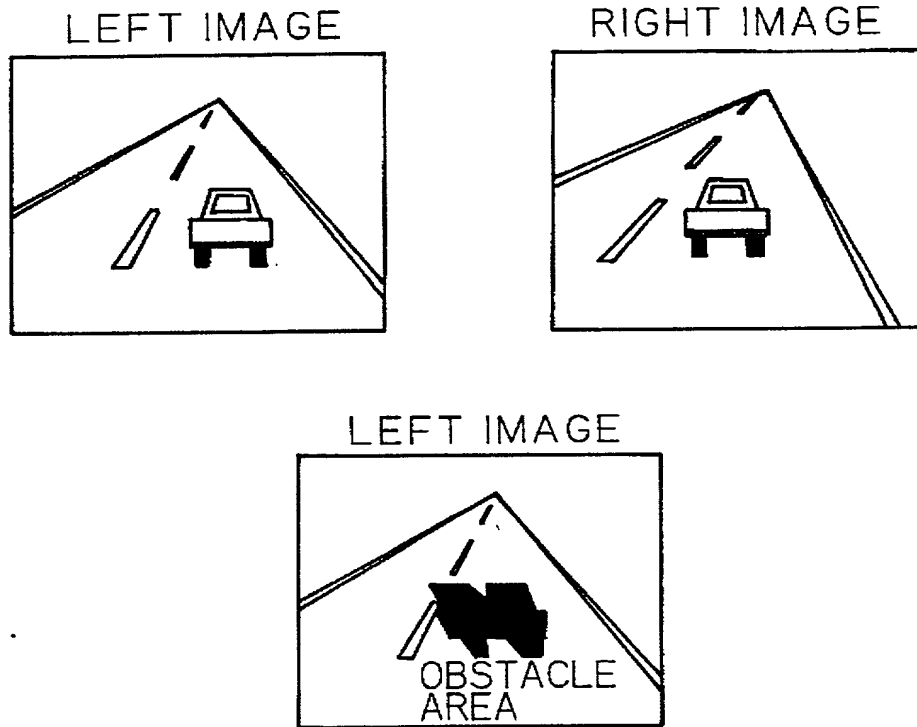


FIG. 44

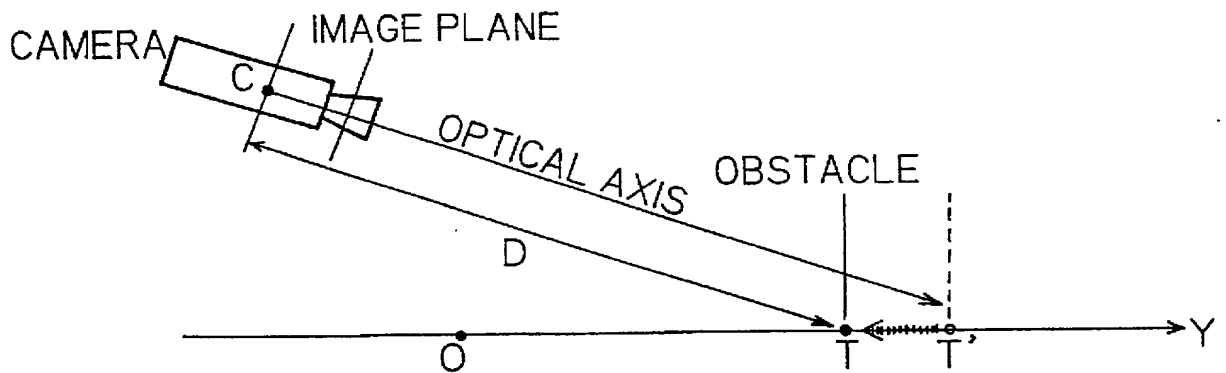


FIG. 45

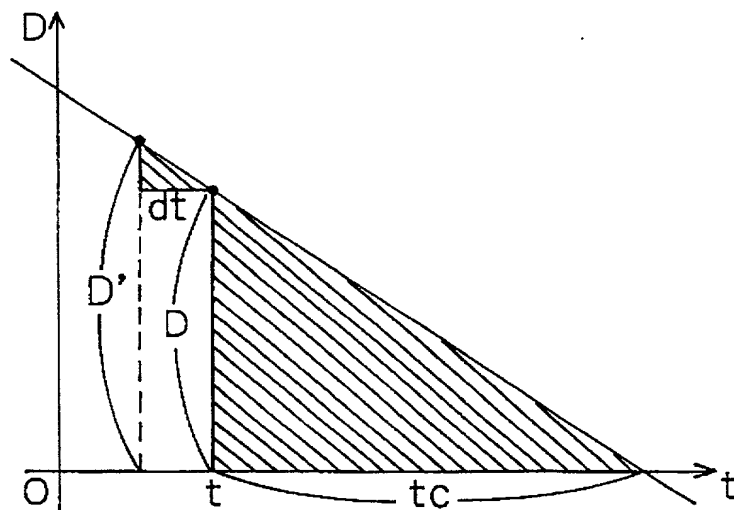


FIG. 46

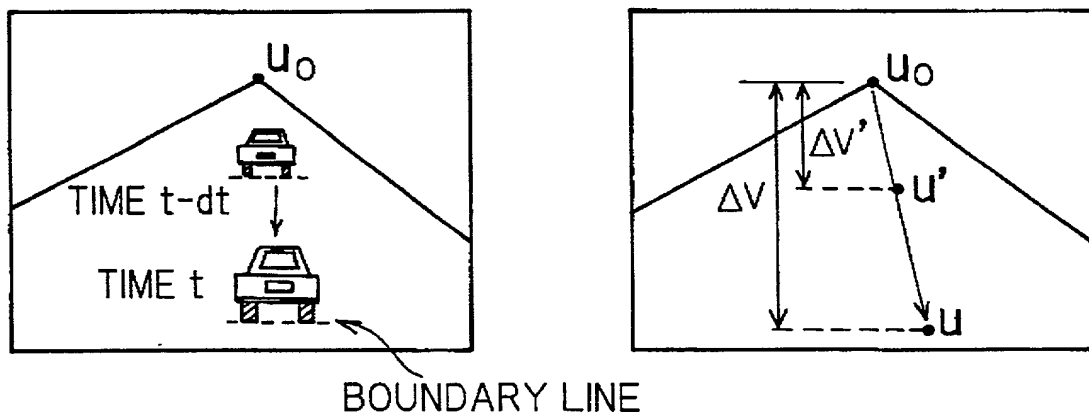


FIG. 47

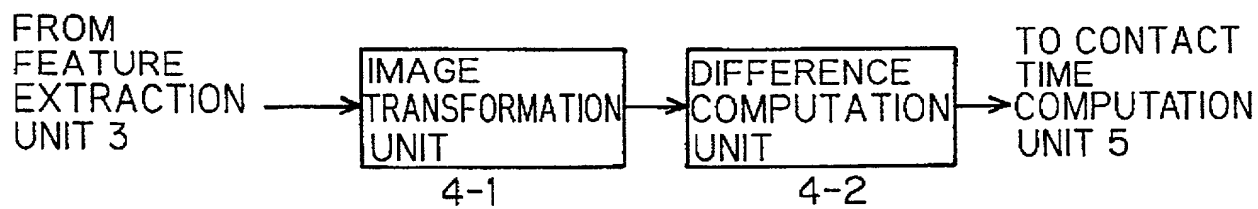
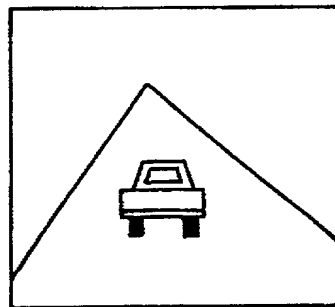
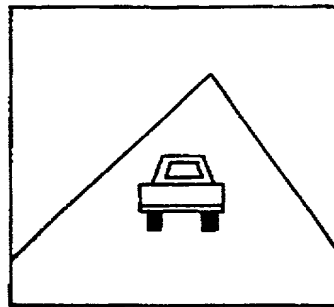




FIG. 48

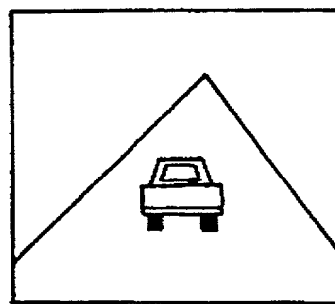


LEFT IMAGE



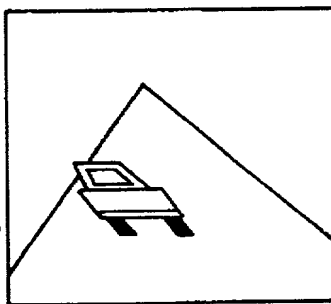
RIGHT IMAGE

FIG. 49



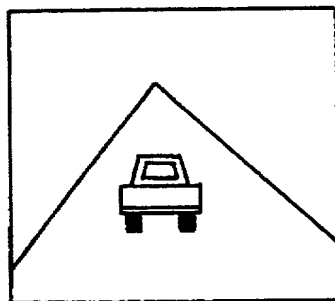
RIGHT IMAGE

IMAGE  
TRANSFORMATION

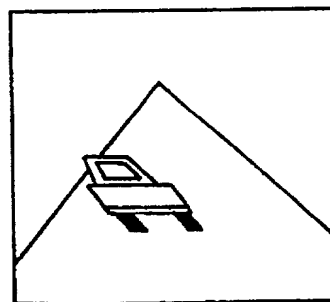


TRANSFORMED  
IMAGE

FIG. 50



LEFT IMAGE



TRANSFORMED  
IMAGE

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**IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE**

IN RE APPLICATION OF: Hiroshi HATTORI, et al.

\*FILING DATE: Herewith

FOR: OBSTACLE DETECTION SYSTEM AND METHOD THEREFOR

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER FOR PATENTS  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20231

Listed below are the names and addresses of the inventors for the above-identified patent application.

A declaration containing all the necessary information will be submitted at a later date.

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